

The GatherKudos Review & Reputation Management Strategy Guide

# 13 Rockstar Tips

## to Get Reviews (That Don't Suck)

by Jason Hull

★★★★★  
**GatherKudos**  
Get more positive reviews online

# 13 Rockstar Tips to Get Reviews (That Don't Suck)

*The GatherKudos Review & Reputation Management Strategy Guide*<sup>1</sup>

*by Jason Hull*



Is brought to you by...



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For good karma: We did our best to give credit to all sources used throughout this book. Likewise, if you write, blog, or video any ideas gained from this book, please give mention to Jason Hull & GatherKudos and include a backlink to <http://gatherkudos.com>.

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<sup>1</sup> Version 1.6 - 10/9/2014

<sup>2</sup> Cover photo by Christian Grube for Access2music.de

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## Introductions - Me and We

**I am Jason Hull.** I believe my purpose is to uncover and learn useful principles and share them with others. I love finding those golden nuggets of wisdom that can improve your life and business. I gather these ideas because I love to learn and find useful stuff - and this guide is full of stuff that is actually useful. This isn't a stupid ebook full of common ideas that is a waste of your hard drive space. I run a website design firm, which is a small business, just like yours and reviews matter to me. This isn't hype. My goal was to provide real value.



**We are OpenPotion Website Design**, a small and fierce website design firm that focuses on building websites that sell. Our goal is to build awesome relationships with our small business clients and build incredibly effective websites.

Stop by and say hello: <http://www.openpotion.com>

We started GatherKudos out of our own need to make it easier for happy clients to leave reviews and to implement our own review strategy. This guide is built around what we have learned and will continue to be updated as we learn more.

Helen, my brain (assistant), messaged me after editing it: "Ok. I'm done. That's a really good ebook by the way". And then added, "What you lack in comma knowledge, you make up for in ebook advice :)". Well, I hope you love these ideas as much as I do.

## Fast Track to Being a Rockstar

What does it take to be a rockstar? Tattoos and a mic?<sup>3</sup>

Nah. Just a review funnel page from GatherKudos and our **13 Rockstar Tips**, which are sprinkled throughout this document. If you are impatient, just skip to the end where all of our tips are consolidated in one spot. Be sure to go back and read this entire thing though, because it is packed with delicious morsels of customer service knowledge (and you'll be missing out).



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<sup>3</sup> Photo by Luis Blanco: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lbpressphotography/8354377911/>

## Reviews Matter

Look at these businesses. Their websites haven't even been considered at this stage. Which one would you choose first? (Notice Google chose them first too):

**Fort Lowell Realty & Property Mana...**  
www.flraz.com  
4.7 ★★★★★ 32 Google reviews · Google+ page

A 2921 E Fort Lowell Rd  
Tucson, AZ  
(520) 322-0000

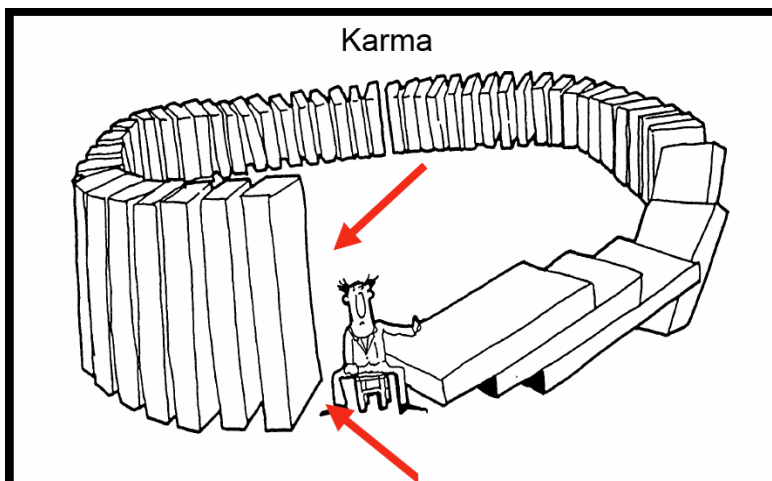
**Prestige Property Management**  
www.prestigepropertymgmt.com  
2.2 ★★☆☆☆ 11 Google reviews · Google+ page

B 3205 E Grant Rd  
Tucson, AZ  
(520) 881-0930

**Property Management Group**  
www.thepropertymanagementgroup.com  
3.1 ★★★☆☆ 6 Google reviews

C 6720 N Camino Principal  
#103  
Tucson, AZ  
(520) 721-7121

Reviews matter more than ever. Think about the fact that one bad review can kill a business. Some businesses have gone viral for negative things and will never recover. A whole industry surrounding online reviews has cropped up, including businesses that do reputation management, businesses focused on gathering reviews, local search marketers that are heavily focused on the review industry, and several businesses that even provide fake reviews for clients. **Reviews are instant karma. So be careful about the ripple you create.**



Reviews can make or break a business. Reviews are a way of you standing out, or they can be a way of making you looking terrible. Before somebody will even get to your website, they will likely see your online reviews. And that can mean the difference between them calling you, and them calling your competitor... or them clicking through to your website, or choosing someone else's website instead.

## FYI: You Already Have a Review Strategy

Do you have one? You may not realize it, but every company has a review strategy, even if it is just hoping you get good reviews and praying you don't get bad ones (this is a pretty crappy review strategy, by the way).

This guide will give you real, actionable tips to establishing a solid review strategy for your business. If customer service is truly at the core of your business, then this strategy will be too. It will be part of every team member's thoughts when interacting with clients. Without a solid review strategy in place, you will be unaware of problems that exist in your business. You will be out of touch with your customers needs and pains. You will bleed more money in missed business than you ever gain from any of your marketing efforts.

## Get Found Locally

Google looks at review diversity (having reviews on multiple review sites), review quantity, and review ratings as a ranking factor for its local-search and organic search results.

**Rockstar Tip #1: Set up (or gain control) of your business listings on each major review site. Google, Yelp, Citysearch, and Facebook Pages are the essentials. Make sure they are consistent.**

Make sure you have a business listing as many places as possible. Start with Google My Business", then make sure your NAP (Name, Address, Phone) match precisely what Google has, everywhere else.

<http://www.google.com/business/>

Too busy? Want help with this? Contact our team to help get these set up:

[www.openpotion.com](http://www.openpotion.com)

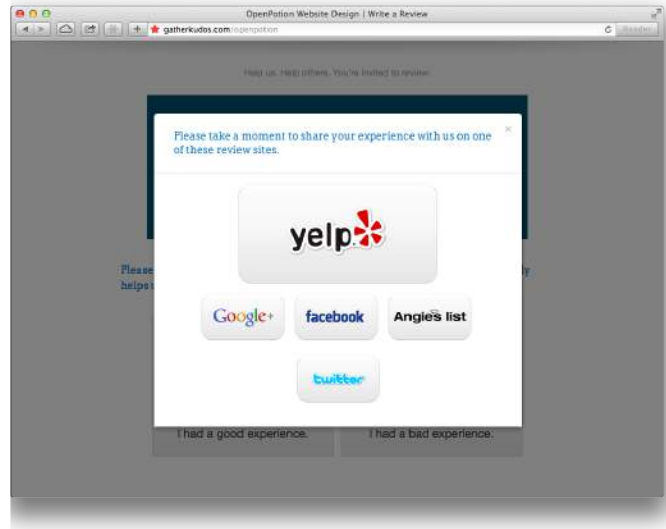
## Don't Have GatherKudos?

Well, this is awkward... Just joking. We wrote this guide for GatherKudos clients, but you'll get some great ideas from it nonetheless.

**Rockstar Tip #2: Get a review funnel page for your small business from GatherKudos.**

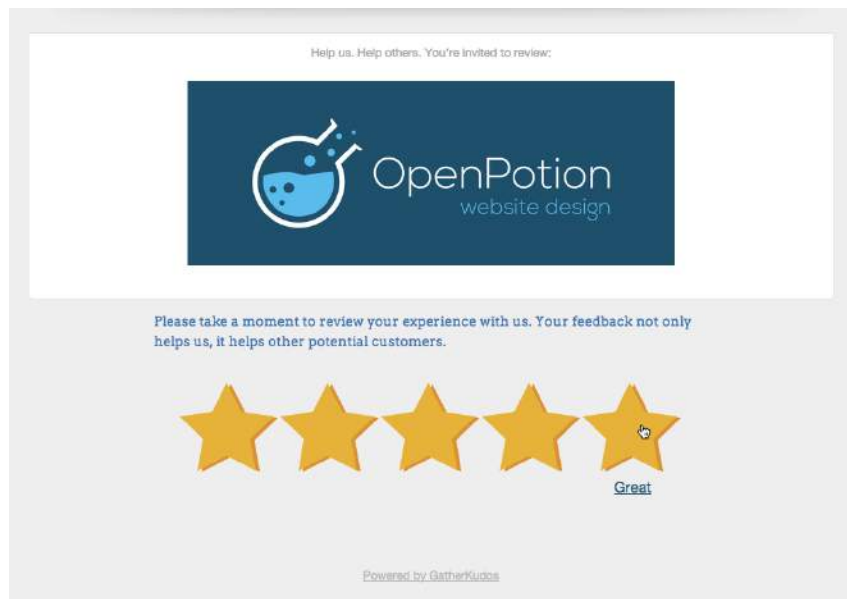
### What is GatherKudos?

GatherKudos is a custom review funnel page for your local business that helps **eliminate negative reviews** and helps you **get more positive reviews**.



The longer version? GatherKudos is a page that lists all your review sites. It prevents negative reviews by sending negative feedback directly to you, which makes you aware of issues before they escalate into a negative review. GatherKudos also lubricates the review process for your happy customers and facilitates review diversity (an important ranking factor search engines). It is awesome and we are really excited about it.

Check out [GatherKudos.com](http://GatherKudos.com) for more info.





## Don't Fake It 'Til You Make It

The first temptation is to fake business reviews. Faking good reviews, leaving fake negative reviews, or hiring companies to write fake reviews is not only unethical, **it is a really bad idea**. Review sites have an eagle eye for this stuff, and will either filter those reviews or, even worse, brand you as a fishy business:



Customers can usually tell. It leaves a scent that doesn't come off easily. Don't even consider paying for reviews.

## Change What Needs Changing

You know you need to fix that leaky faucet in the restroom and get that hole patched in your lobby wall that angry-client-Steve kicked in. Staff member Mitch... he's got to go because he's really abrasive, and that deal offered on your website that is no longer being honored needs to come down. If you know it needs taking care of, then do it before others start mentioning it. Especially if it affects customer perception or customer service.

I bet you can think of several small things that need to be taken care of that wouldn't really cost a fortune. Maybe even take a look at improving more costly things and evaluate what sort of return they might provide. What matters to your clientele should matter to you. Like that meatball sandwich no one likes.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> This photo from <http://evgrieve.com/2012/05/everyone-loves-really-bad-meatball.html> went viral on Reddit

## Start With Why

Simon Sinek, the author of the book *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, points out that the reason “Why” your organization exists is critical and foundational. Check out his 18-minute Ted talk (you’ll thank me):

[http://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action](http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action)



**Simon says, “People don’t buy *what* you do, they buy *why* you do it.”** He’s a big advocate of finding your “why statement”. My personal why statement is “to inspire others to love true principles.” I would do it for free, because I love sharing ideas. My web design company, OpenPotion, has the mission statement “To build awesome relationships and incredibly effective websites”. This why statement gives everyone on my team a vision and moves them beyond simple task completion towards a unified purpose. From my experience, **giving your team a purpose changes the way they act towards customers and the way they view their job.** No one wants to do meaningless work.

Determine your values and beliefs and make sure your team members and staff share those values. Come up with an 8 word mission statement and start it with a verb/action. This is your company’s core or center and is essential that it comes first. When you or the business lose sight of why you started it in the first place, it becomes a chore and you then serve the business instead of it serving you. The “Why” must come before a review strategy can exist. So begin with “Why”.

## Provide Good Service

Duh. Give good service to get good reviews? Wow... this seems stupid to even mention, right?! Stick with us... we'll go into some important principles here you may not have considered.

Gallup did some aggressive polling and wrote a book called *First, Break All the Rules*. In the book they mention the “Hierarchy of Customer Expectations” or the customer satisfaction pyramid:



At the foundation of customer satisfaction is Accuracy and then Availability. **These are expected and demanded** and if you do them perfectly, you only *prevent* customer dissatisfaction!

### Accuracy

Accuracy means getting their order right, doing what you said you would do, delivering the value you claimed you would. You need to set very clear and realistic expectations with new clients. To be incredibly accurate, you either need to improve your sales message and the claimed value you will provide or improve your delivered value so it matches what's on the tin. **Transparency and honesty facilitate accuracy.** Read the previous sentence a few times.

### Availability

Availability means being available and reachable, without hold times, long lines, or barriers. Opt in favor of a real person answering the phone instead of an auto-attendant or even worse, a voice mail. Add live chat to your website.

## Partnership

Partnership means the customer feels you *understand* them and their needs and concerns, you are *like* them, and are in it *with* them. If you aren't *with* them, then you are *against* them. This means you need to know what they are thinking and maybe put yourself in their shoes.

GatherKudos helps you get feedback, which is a power tool to stay in partnership with your customers

## Advice

Advice means you are giving them the value of your expertise. They trust your judgement and view you as an authority. Remember this takeaway: **Advice Breeds Loyalty.**

Why do consumers go to a business? So that the business can solve a problem or benefit them with their unique product or service. They want your expertise. Advice is effectively done during interactions, such as your sales process. Blogging is also an excellent way to do this. What value or wisdom can you teach your customer or give away to establish yourself as an authority? A good method to find your value is by asking yourself this: Why are you qualified to do this job, and not your customer? Look for a great tip related to this, later in this document.

**Rockstar Tip #3: Start with “Why” and then focus on providing great service by using these four principles: Accuracy, Availability, Partnership, & Advice.**

## Putting it Together

In short: To prevent bad reviews, focus on availability and accuracy. To get positive reviews, go beyond just availability and accuracy, and provide partnership and advice. Let's theorize the perfect waitress based on these four principles. She would... give great advice on what to order (advice), treat you as if you were family (partnership), make sure she got your order correct (accuracy), and she would check back often (availability). Who wouldn't want her as a waitress? Hmm... maybe this guy<sup>5</sup>:



<sup>5</sup> Original Photo by Neil Grabowsky <http://www.flickr.com/photos/montclairfilmfest/14112271501/>

## Beware of Solicitation

Be very careful and tactful about asking for reviews directly (or just don't). Remember Yelp hates this and it can be annoying.

A quick story. My wife once bought a BMW from a dealership that aggressively, throughout the sales process, solicited for a 5 star review. Each person she interacted with kept holding up 5 fingers saying "remember, when the survey people call, say five." My wife smiled, nodded, and when the survey people eventually called, she gave them a 1. She was assured it was anonymous. They made matters worse by calling her up and calling her out on the one star rating she gave them, rather than take the feedback she provided to heart.



By then, what review do you think she felt like giving them online? How many people do you think we told about our experience with BMW of Santa Monica? Even more now. ;-)

If done tactfully, asking for happy clients to share their experience with others can be natural (not needy or awkward) and land you more positive reviews. Yelp says not to ask. GatherKudos allows you to not have to ever ask for a Yelp review. Just ask for feedback, and if they are a Yelper, they may choose Yelp.

**Rockstar Tip #4: Ask clients how their experience with your company has been. If they rave about you, thank them and mention that you'd love it if they would share their experience with others. Send a followup email or thank you letter stating how glad you are to hear they have had a good experience and include your GatherKudos link.**

## Give Upset Customers a Voice

Consumers will inevitably get upset and have issues, or concerns. In the past, business owners used staff as a shield from upset consumers. Why not? It didn't really matter, because they didn't have much of a voice anyhow. Then came the internet, online reviews, and social media. Consumers need to be heard when they feel wronged, and now they have a global platform. So either you listen and make yourself available, or they will shout it from the rooftops.



**Rockstar Tip #5: Increase your availability and create partnership by placing your GatherKudos link anywhere your clients are: Have your staff put it in their email signatures. Put it on your client-oriented areas of your website. Include it with thank-you notes you send to new clients.**

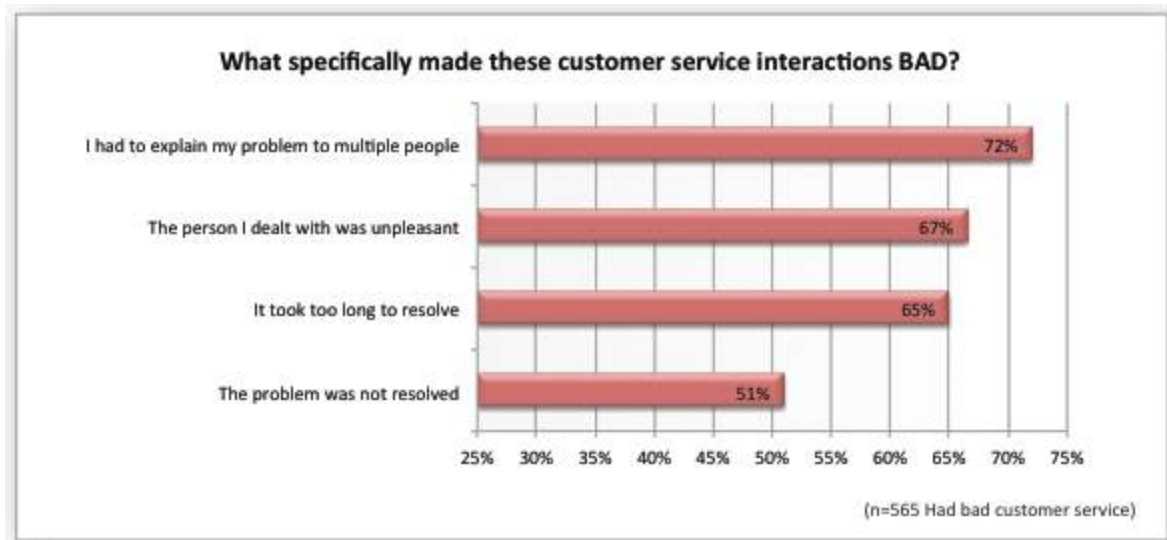
If you are getting negative reviews, it doesn't necessarily mean you have abnormally bad service, or a terrible product (though that could be the case). It is much more likely that your consumers just don't have a way to have their concern evaluated. Most people don't want to bad mouth others online, but felt that they were treated unjustly. You might think it would benefit you to only ask for the positive feedback, but it usually has the reverse effect of not giving a voice to your unhappy customers. Negative feedback will happen, so find the right way to deal with it.

In my business, we ask each client for feedback directly during our direct interactions. If you are getting negative reviews, this is a sign they don't have any other outlet for their feedback.

**Rockstar Tip #6: Make sure to ask for honest feedback - the good AND BAD - wherever you place your GatherKudos link. This helps route the highly-motivated, upset customers towards your review funnel so it can do its job (preventing bad reviews) and get you valuable feedback you might not otherwise get.**

## Give Unhappy Customers Direct Access to a Decision-maker

Nothing is more frustrating than having to jump through several hoops and tell your problem to multiple people with little to no power to improve your situation. Just look at the results from this Zendesk survey<sup>6</sup> follow-up question regarding bad customer service:



Their primary concern? If we summed up all four, it would be this:

***Being able to communicate immediately with a decision-maker that can resolve things quickly (that isn't a defensive jerk).***

Realize that if the closest route to important people in the organization is Yelp or Twitter or Facebook, then people will complain on Yelp, Twitter, or Facebook.

**Rockstar Tip #7: Include the business owner's cell phone number on the negative review filter in GatherKudos. Nothing stops negative reviews like being able to go to the top and being heard.**

As a business owner, remember that any barrier to negative feedback reaching your ear directly, is a barrier to your business having a good reputation.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.zendesk.com/resources/customer-service-and-lifetime-customer-value>

## Lose the Battle - Win the War

Sometimes the customer or client is just plain in the wrong, but that doesn't mean it would be a wise business decision to tell the customer to go pound sand. It is important to evaluate the cost of possible negative reviews and multiply those as they accumulated over time. How much of your future business might go elsewhere? Sure, company policy might be rigid and necessary, but every situation needs to be properly weighed against your future reputation.

How much are you willing to spend or give in order to prevent an angry customer? Consider that the Ritz-Carlton authorizes every staff member, without approval, to spend up to \$2000 per incident (not per guest), to ensure customer satisfaction.<sup>7</sup>

**Rockstar Tip #8: Properly evaluate the cost of a possible negative review and then take appropriate action, compromise, or spend a little money to please upset customers.**

**A rough calculation:** First take the number of new customers you usually get each month. Then estimate how many of those new customers might see your online reviews and star ratings before calling. Studies indicate this is between 80 - 90%. Then guess how many of those would have been lost if you had one star less, or some negative reviews. Then put a dollar amount on it. Don't forget to calculate the lifetime value of a typical customer.

**Example:** You get 10 new clients a month. 8 of them check reviews first. Maybe half of those 8 would not want to work with you if you had negative reviews and a 3 star rating. So you would be losing out on 40% of your usual new business. Maybe that is \$10,000 in lost business you could have saved with a few grand.

Sure it isn't an exact science, but you get the idea. It just makes financial business sense to be willing to lose some battles in order to win the war.

**“Sometimes by losing a battle you find a new way to win the war.”**

**- Donald Trump<sup>8</sup>**



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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/2009/10/30/simon-cooper-ritz-leadership-ceonetwork-hotels.html>

<sup>8</sup> Photo of Donald Trump by Gage Skidmore

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donald\\_Trump\\_by\\_Gage\\_Skidmore.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donald_Trump_by_Gage_Skidmore.jpg)



## Reviews Can Go Viral

Remember that good or bad reviews can go viral. This means something positive or negative can be magnified beyond your wildest imagination.

### A Major Ouch!

A negative example was when a songwriter made the music video “United Breaks Guitars” documenting how United Airlines broke his guitar and refused to pay for it. The video has over 14 million views<sup>9</sup> and he started a whole business around the name of his song. Ouch. Bet they wish they had paid for that guitar.



### You Can't Buy Publicity Like This

A positive example was when a family left behind “Joshie”, a young boy’s stuffed Giraffe, at the Ritz Carlton. The father told his son, who was distraught at the lack of Joshie, that he was just on an extended vacation so he could get his son to sleep and then contacted the Ritz Carlton that night. They made the statement true by returning Joshie with gifts and a binder documenting Joshie’s vacation in photos getting a massage, lounging by the pool, etc.



The father wrote an article for the Huffington Post and posted a video online, and it has become a legendary example of great customer service.<sup>10</sup> You can’t pay for advertising that is that effective! And I doubt it cost anywhere near that \$2000 I mentioned earlier.

<sup>9</sup>Photo is a screenshot from the “United Breaks Guitars” video: <http://youtu.be/5YGc4zOqozo>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-hurn/stuffed-giraffe-shows-wha\\_b\\_1524038.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-hurn/stuffed-giraffe-shows-wha_b_1524038.html)

# Dealing With Bad Reviews

So a bad review made it through your web of awesomeness. If you have done everything mentioned thus far, this bad review is likely not a surprise. You knew it was coming, and you already did what you could to lessen the blow. The negative review hurts, and you may want to retaliate. People want to see whether you respond maturely, ignore it, or reveal pettiness so they can judge you.

## How to Respond

Obviously responding maturely is the right course... Now it is time to manage the message and keep your cool, because a bad response can do far more damage than a bad review. People love to see a business owner accept negative feedback and respond with empathy and firmness. Show your business is run by humans with humanity.

### Here's some ideas:

1. Thank them for their feedback and acknowledge their frustration.
2. Admit you fell short, that your organization isn't perfect,
3. but that you constantly seek to be better.
4. Explain your side, but stick to the facts and keep emotion out.
5. Highlight your strengths.
6. Mention learning or change if possible.
7. Leave the door open for them to return and ask for another shot.

**Remember that whenever you fail to inspire, you always control.** You may be able to earn or inspire a person to positively update their negative feedback, but **NEVER, EVER bribe, or threaten someone to get them to change their review** because the result is typically worse than a bad review.

### Example Response 1:

*Sam, we are sorry you had a bad experience. We've helped hundreds of happy clients successfully and nothing is more painful to hear and we take these things very seriously. We have already met as a team to discuss how we can better prevent situations like this in the future. We hope you will give us another shot in a month or two and let us know if we have improved.*

### Example Response 2:

*Melanie, we appreciate your feedback on our restaurant decor. My husband and I built this business from the ground up 10 years ago with a vision to provide affordable food and a comfortable environment. We've done the best we can within our available budget, but admit it hasn't been a focus recently. If you have specific recommendations please shoot me an email or give me a call as interior design is not my strong suit and we would value any specific feedback you could provide.*

### Example Response 3:

*We appreciate all feedback and use it to improve our processes. We admit we aren't perfect and are sorry you had a bad experience. We understand how it can be frustrating to not have your lease renewed, however you made a claim directly to the owner of the property that you had a felony, which wasn't disclosed to us, and doesn't show on criminal background checks (because you weren't actually convicted). We lost the client due to your claim and feel the pain as well. In over 15 years of managing properties, this is the first time this has happened. We have altered our processes to prevent future issues like this and wish you a successful future, free of criminal activity, and full of wise discretion.*

Ok maybe I'd leave the snarky jab out at the end... but maybe not. Sometimes public shaming can pay off. Look how this waitress handled Mark, which went viral:

The screenshot shows a Yelp review from a user named Mark, dated 8/30/2013. The review is 5 stars and contains a negative comment about the smell and staff. Below the review are buttons for 'Useful', 'Funny 8', and 'Cool', along with options to bookmark, send to a friend, or link to the review. A comment from a user named Meri, dated 9/31/2013, responds to the review with a direct and somewhat snarky reply.

Mark [redacted] 8/30/2013

I live in [redacted] and really wanted to like this place. But, frankly, it smells. Maybe if you sit outside you can't smell the nastiness, but inside is gross. It smells like it has been there for 50 years and never been clean, but it is a newer place. Some of the staff look cracked out. Looks like something you'd find a seedy part of town. I will avoid this place in the future. There are plenty of other places in the area to have a better experience.

Was this review ...?

Useful Funny 8 Cool

Bookmark Send to a Friend Link to This Review

Comment from Meri [redacted] 9/31/2013 « Hide

Hi Mark [redacted]

Thank you so much for the valuable input. Quick question for you!

Which part made it smell worse? The part where we didn't serve you any alcohol or the part where you harassed the female staff by exposing your chest hair in lieu of showing your ID? Next time you want a Miller Lite, please bring the appropriate ID that is required when you go to a bar and we'll gladly serve you.

Flag this comment

I usually have my wife read stuff I write in dealing with touchy situations to make sure I don't sound like a complete jerk. If you are too close to it and too touchy... have someone at least review what you wrote and ask if you sound like a jerk, before submitting it to the world.

**Rockstar Tip #9: Respond to negative reviews intelligently and have someone that is diplomatic and less attached, read over your response before responding.**

## Make Lemonade from Bitter Lemons

Or even better, use the seeds to grow a lemon tree. Below is one of the most challenging letters I ever had to write. It was written to a web design client that signed on for a short 6-hour project, but then was never satisfied with our work, continually asked for changes and revisions, and in the end refused to pay. My options were war or forgiveness. Here's my final response, in a train of emails with the client, that ended the conflict:

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*[Client], I felt really hurt by all of this. I felt taken advantage of, mistreated, angry, and judged.*

*I wrote a very lengthy, angry rebuttal, I contemplated taking revenge in online reviews, and then I waited and decided that there really is no point and that that is not who I am. I decided that it wouldn't serve you, my self, or the greater good... so I deleted it. Here is version 2.0*

### ***We did honest work & I feel good about that***

*The original scope of 6 hours and a few tasks you provided, grew far beyond what either of us expected. We spent at least that much time on the phone with you alone. Our hourly rate was \$85 at the time and I have attached the pdf of our tasks and time tracked. This is after I removed all time for all phone calls, and the first revision that you rejected. The data is all there. We tracked all time, and every task is recorded, and every phone call was time-stamped in my phone system log and in our CRM with notes of all your task requests. We did all that you asked during the several hours on the phone with you. We then even settled on a reduced amount with you. I ate lots of hours of time, for which I still had to pay my team. I know that we worked hard for you and that I bent over backwards to accommodate you and I never want you to doubt that we did a lot of work.*

### ***Forgiveness is the only true end to a conflict and it might as well be done by the only person I can control...me***

*Regardless of the data, I don't gain anything by trying to be right. I don't benefit by wasting time and resources to get money when someone doesn't want to pay. And I certainly don't need revenge or to prolong this, since it will only cause more stress and harm. I know the best and highest thing I can do is forgive your debt and move on.*

*Consider the remaining debt paid in full and nullified.*

### ***My Realizations***

*All this blame has been useless, I best benefit by realizing that I made several mistakes that got me to this point... (by breaking my usual best practices). My mistakes included: 1) Not getting the original project scope, payment terms, and delivery terms in writing and signed, simply because I thought it would remain a small single-day project. 2) Accepting partial payment of invoices and then continuing work regardless 3) Delivering a site before final payment was made 4) Taking on a client that a web designer wanted to hand off to someone else mid-project (regardless of the circumstances).*

### **Finding the Truth**

*[Client], these situations are great lessons to me and make our company stronger and better and so for that I am grateful to you. We are moving on to greater and larger things and this will be beneficial.*

*I'm sure as a dance instructor you have a laser vision on details, but at heart your true goal is mainly to have fun and enjoy life. Normally getting a new website is an exciting thing, yet I recognize that this has not been enjoyable for you and I apologize. Please forgive me.*

*You may not think much of me as a designer and I may not think you are my ideal web design client, but I recognize that there must be countless people that love you and value your dance instruction and that you must be a much easier person to work with in different circumstances. I love details and to have fun, and outside of this failed transaction, I'm sure we would have gotten along perfectly.*

*I wish you success with your dance business and your website. Enjoy the holidays, and may the new year be your best year of dance yet.*

*Jason Hull*

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Even though I felt the client was clearly at fault, I didn't want it to happen ever again. In order to write this, I had to take a big step back and see my own contribution to the situation. This was a bitter pill to swallow, but when I did this, I realized that I had made some major blunders in judgement before the project even began. Also, take note that I forced myself to "find the truth" and see her more objectively.

I wrote this letter more for myself than for the client, and doing so changed my business (and myself) for the better. I'm grateful for the experience. It helped us improve our contracts, and helped us better screen the types of clients and projects that we take on. **Don't miss out on your biggest learning opportunities, which are found during your most frustrating situations.** You can only change yourself and your own business, so determine what you did wrong in order to prevent similar situations in the future.



**When life gives you lemons, don't just sugar coat it and make lemonade. Dig out those slippery seeds inside and plant some lemon trees.** Sure, it's more work, but it's worth it.

## It May Not Be About You

Running with the lemon metaphor... no matter how hard you squeeze a lemon, you will never get orange juice to come out. When we get squeezed by life, only what is already in us will come out. Realize that often people have struggles and stresses that may have little to do with your business. Compassion and empathy can go a long way. I've spoken with upset or difficult clients before and found they were dealing with the death of a loved one, a debilitating illness, or a divorce. Read the full heartfelt blog post here, but grab some tissues first:

<http://bravegirlsclub.com/archives/2151>

The author was experiencing heartache and challenges due to her husband injuring his brain's frontal lobe and then battling mental illness and depression. Out of desperation they eventually put all of their costly farming equipment out on their front lawn with a large sign stating it was for sale. Their lawn had been neglected it looked terrible. Her husband then got an irate neighbor calling. She wrote this...

He answered his phone...I saw that he was just listening...I could hear that the person's voice was getting louder and louder and louder.....my husband just listened. He turned his back to me a little so I wouldn't hear. But I could hear it....It seemed to go on and on and on.....

These were the things I could hear on the other end of the phonecall....

"You are bringing down the value of my property with that ugly sign!"

"What are you doing?"

"That is the most obnoxious sign, do you have a permit to have that out there?"

"Are you starting a used car lot?"

"You have got to get all of that moved and out of here or I am calling the authorities"



I sat there, mortified, embarrassed, humiliated, mad, sad, devastated. I was certain that this would snap my husband back into his dark hellish place.

But, when the man was done ranting, my husband waited a second and then very calmly said something that I will never, ever forget.....

"Sir," he said, "There was a time in this country, in this community...when if you drove past your neighbor's house and saw every single thing they own was for sale in front of their house...and that

their lawn had not been mowed for weeks....that you would stop and say....WHAT IS GOING ON, SOMETHING MUST BE TERRIBLY WRONG, WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP YOU?"

The man was silent.....and then my husband went on to tell him a few details about what was going on with our family....

The man waited a moment and then his tone changed.....he apologized....I mean, really apologized and then said...

"I am going to call all of my friends and see if any of them need any of this stuff...."

I wish with everything in me that we could have put a sign up on that big stupid lit up billboard in our field that said OUR LIFE IS FALLING APART.... but all that we really could put up is a sign with the price of everything that we owned that was worth any money.....

WHAT IF we could all wear a sign that said what WE REALLY MEANT? What if we could go straight past the small talk.....or the masks.....and we could actually go straight to the heart of the matter.....what if our friends and family wore signs like this?



Everyone has secret pains they are dealing with. What if they wore a sign that mentioned their struggle, would you treat them differently? **Perhaps their complaining is that sign.** Keep that in mind when dealing with upset customers. You may just be the scapegoat. Connect with the human, not the problem and you might resolve things just by them realizing that the problem isn't you - their life is just tough at the moment.

## Connect in the Real World

Potentially negative or touchy situations should always be handled in the most direct form of communication possible. Face-to-face is ideal, but at least a phone call is better than email. This doesn't just apply to negative situations.

**Rockstar Tip #10: In touchy situations, always seek to communicate in the most personal way possible - in person, video, or at least by phone - rather than through email.**

People often compartmentalize their online life separately from the offline world and give less attention to things online. By giving them the GatherKudos URL to them in a thank-you note or on something printed or tangible, you can increase the odds of getting positive reviews or preventing negative ones.

**Rockstar Tip #11: Order some GatherKudos Cards, simple business cards that ask for feedback, include a scannable QR code and your GatherKudos URL. Hand these to new or happy customers, mail them with thank-you notes.**



[Order Here](#)

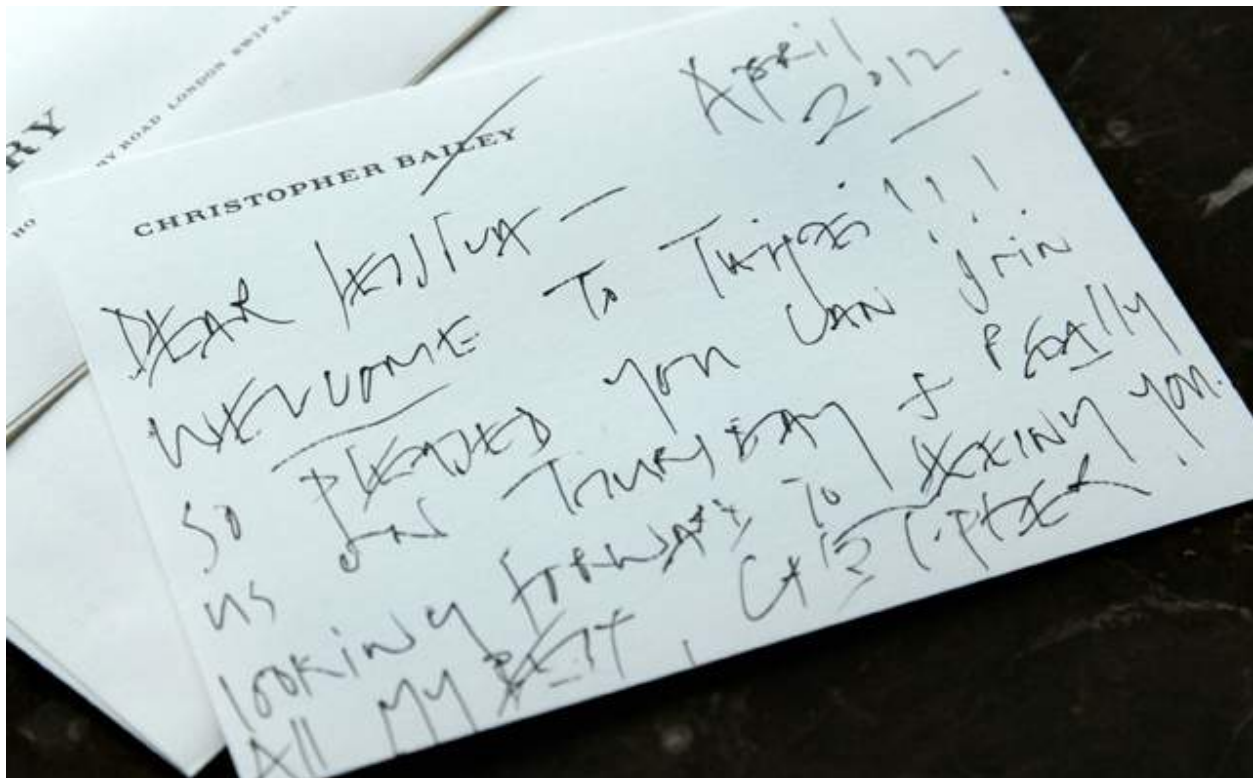


## Handwritten Thank-You Notes

I remember shortly after signing up for Contactually, a CRM, I received a handwritten note. I have gotten hundreds of thank you emails for signing up for services online and usually ignore them. Only one service gave me a handwritten thank you note. I was impressed and felt valued that they took the time to send me a handwritten note. Every time I got frustrated with their software I would think of that note. It seems silly but I think it kept me from canceling with them a few times... like it would be mean for me to cancel after such a nice gesture. It certainly is a way to stand out. Are you sending thank-you notes to new customers?

**Rockstar Tip #12: Send genuine, personal, handwritten thank-you notes to new customers to really solidify a positive start to your relationship. Don't forget to ask for honest feedback and include your GatherKudos URL or just toss in a GatherKudos card.**

You can also send thank you notes as a follow up to positive reviews. Why not? They put effort into it. Reciprocate.



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<sup>11</sup> Photo from <http://www.smtownnsd.com/2012/04/jessica-at-burberry-taiwan-flagship.html>

## Exchanging Value (The Right Way)

The last thing you want to do is get caught offering incentives in exchange for reviews. **Never, ever, ever offer a bribe, payment, or perk in exchange for a good review.** Yelp will publicly shame you.

Nothing looks sleazier and undermines the positive reviews you have more than someone outing your shady tactic.

You can, however, do something nice in exchange for them taking their time to stop by your review page.

Consider that it takes time and is generally painful to leave reviews. By giving a customer *true* value, they will feel a natural desire to reciprocate with a good review. This is very different than offering to give them a perk if they give you a good review. We can actually do this on your GatherKudos page.

### Consumer Alert



We caught someone offering up cash, discounts or other incentives in exchange for reviews about We wanted you to know because buying reviews consumers, but also honest businesses who pla Check out the evidence [here](#).

Show me the reviews

**Rockstar Tip #13: Offer a free, “no review necessary!” PDF download on your GatherKudos page as an incentive to get them there, and to leverage the power of the human need to reciprocate kindness, and to create loyalty by giving advice.**

Make sure the free PDF is useful and gives some great advice, something relevant to your client, to further solidify their loyalty (remember, advice breeds loyalty). A great formula is to start with a number, speak in terms of results, mention their pain and give value.

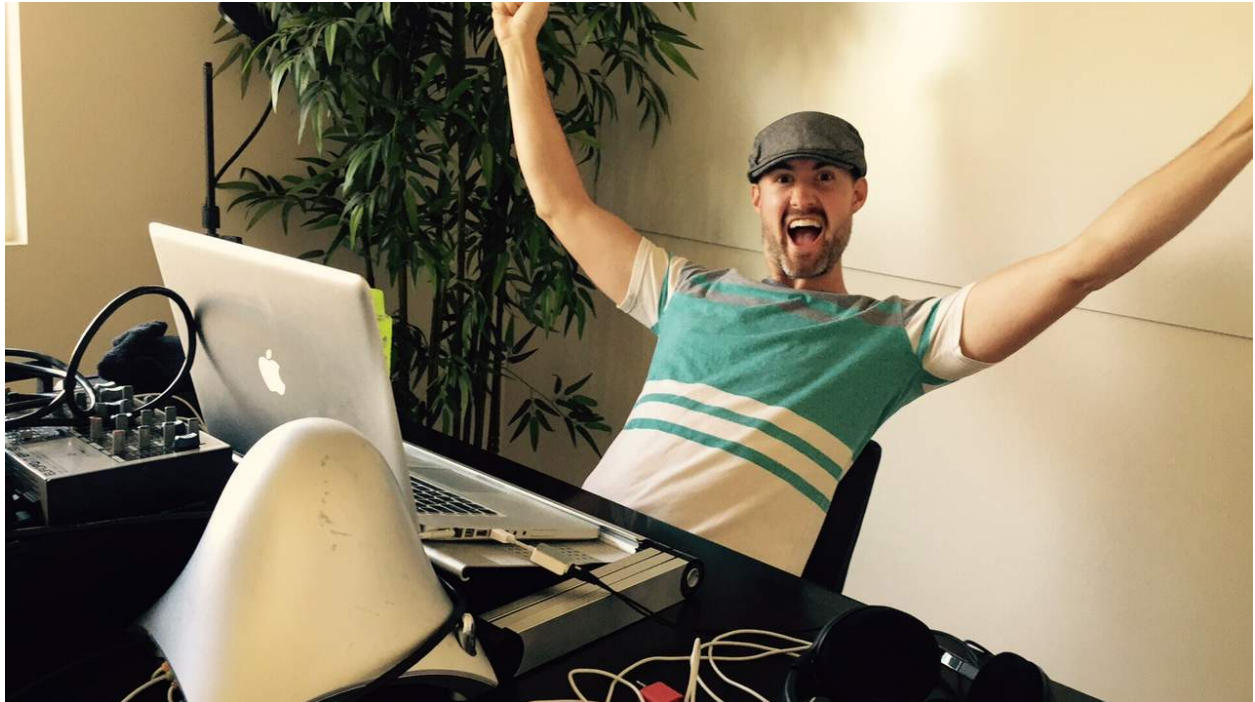
### Example PDF Titles:

- Restaurant: Our Secret Recipe for Making Mouth-watering Scones
- Property Manager: 9 Essentials to Finding a Great Rental Property to Rent (or to Own)
- Landscaper: 5 Ways to Cut Your Water Bill & Still Keep Your Lawn Green

You may want to focus it on some common frustrations your clients deal with or something that you know most of your clients would be interested in. What do your clients want or need? Ask them why they came to you in the first place. Ask them what their key frustrations are related to your business. Ask them, “what service or advice do you wish we offered?” or “What’s going on in your life that brought you here today?”

## Go and Do! Return and Report!

Hopefully we have given you some solid, actionable items and some real value. Now it is time to go and do! Come up your personalized strategy. Determine what steps need to be taken. Write it all down and then share it with your team. Make sure to train your staff, document new processes, and improve your current review strategy.



**We did it! We're rockstars!** Let me know how these tips helped you and your business. I'd also love to hear your own ideas and how you built on what I shared, as well as what actions you took to improve your business as a result... so shoot me an email:

[jason@openpotion.com](mailto:jason@openpotion.com)

Thanks!

Jason Hull  
President & CEO  
OpenPotion Website Design  
800-691-6736

p.s. - want some help improving your business online or capturing more leads? Contact me.  
<http://www.openpotion.com/schedule>

## GatherKudos Rockstar Review Strategy Tips

In summary, for your company to be a GatherKudos rockstar at gathering good reviews online, follow these tips:

1. Rockstar Tip #1: Set up (or gain control) of your business listings on each major review site. Google Plus/Places, Yelp, Citysearch, and Facebook Pages are the essentials. Make sure they are consistent.
2. Rockstar Tip #2: Get a review funnel page for your small business from GatherKudos.
3. Rockstar Tip #3: Start with “Why” and then focus on providing great service by using these four principles: Accuracy, Availability, Partnership, & Advice.
4. Rockstar Tip #4: Ask clients how their experience with your company has been. If they rave about you, thank them and mention that you’d love it if they would share their experience with others. Send a followup email or thank you letter stating how glad you are to hear they have had a good experience and include your GatherKudos link.
5. Rockstar Tip #5: Increase your availability and create partnership by placing your GatherKudos link anywhere your clients are: Have your staff put it in their email signatures. Put it on your client-oriented areas of your website. Include it with thank-you notes you send to new clients.
6. Rockstar Tip #6: Make sure to ask for honest feedback - the good AND BAD - wherever you place your GatherKudos link. This helps route the highly-motivated, upset customers towards your review funnel so it can do its job (preventing bad reviews) and get you valuable feedback you might not otherwise get.
7. Rockstar Tip #7: Include the business owner’s cell phone number on the negative review filter in GatherKudos. Nothing stops negative reviews like being able to go to the top and being heard.
8. Rockstar Tip #8: Properly evaluate the cost of a possible negative review and then take appropriate action, compromise, or spend a little money to please upset customers.
9. Rockstar Tip #9: Respond to negative reviews intelligently and have someone that is diplomatic and less attached, read over your response before responding.
10. Rockstar Tip #10: In touchy situations always seek to communicate in the most personal way possible - in person, video, or at least by phone - rather than through email.
11. Rockstar Tip #11: Order some GatherKudos Cards, simple business cards that ask for feedback, include a scannable QR code and your GatherKudos URL. Hand these to new or happy customers, mail them with thank-you notes.
12. Rockstar Tip #12: Send genuine, personal, handwritten thank-you notes to new customers to really solidify a positive start to your relationship. Don’t forget to ask for honest feedback and include your GatherKudos URL or just toss in a GatherKudos card.
13. Rockstar Tip #13: Offer a free, “no review necessary!” PDF download on your GatherKudos page as an incentive to get them there, and to leverage the power of the human need to reciprocate kindness, and to create loyalty by giving advice.