Why Online Reviews Matter â?? The Obvious (and not so Obvious)

Description

For real estate agents and title insurance professionals, your online reputation can make or break you. This is especially true for local businesses. About 88% of Google searches on mobile devices are for services or agents in the area, which means that a large number of potential clients who are looking for information on local housing or title services can be persuaded one way or another based on online reviews.

So, what exactly is an online review? Itâ??s a digital rating of a business or agent created by a consumer that appears on a website. Reviews can appear on the companyâ??s own website â?? think Amazon â?? but review aggregator services like Yelp and Google My Business are just as popular. For the real estate industry, providers like agents and title insurance companies rely on websites like Zillow for customers to leave reviews â?? good and bad.

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Below are three reasons why online reviews matter, and how you can leverage them to grow your business.

1. **Digital Word-of-Mouth**
   In the days before the internet, if you had a positive or negative experience with a real estate professional, you would tell a friend or two and they might tell a friend or two. Nowadays, your online review for a business can be seen by thousands. These ratings are an important factor in a home buyer or sellers decision on whether to hire you.

   According to one study:
   â?¢ 90% of consumers read online reviews
   â?¢ 88% trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations
   â?¢ 31% are likely to spend more on businesses with â??excellentâ?• reviews
   â?¢ 72% say that positive reviews make them trust a local business more
   â?¢ 94% of online shoppers say that they will avoid a business with negative reviews

   Take Action Today
   Set up a Google My Business listing (GMB). Itâ??s a free and easy way to showcase your business and provides a convenient forum to start gathering reviews. Ask customers or clients to review you by simply sending them a brief, friendly email and linking to your GMB listing. If you have more of a niche business, there is likely a review aggregator website specific to your industry, like Angieâ??s List. Find yours, create a profile and ask customers for reviews.
2. **Online Reviews Are a Two-Way Street**
   Consumers today expect companies to respond to their comments. While no agent or title company looks forward to a negative review, it can represent an opportunity to connect, clarify or gather feedback that can ultimately help your business in the long run. Be sure to consistently monitor your online review channels and websites and take the time to respond to good and bad reviews alike.

While most websites do not let you alter or remove negative comments or reviews, they will usually let you respond. Doing so in a timely, non-defensive and cordial way shows that customer â?? and potentially hundreds of others â?? that you care and are responsive to your customers.

Take Action Today
Google yourself and your company name or go to Yelp or your industry-specific review website and do a search. Websites like Yelp allow customers to provide a review about a business, even if the business has not set up a profile. If this is the case, you can â??claimâ?• the page as the owner, which gives you the ability to reply. Identify all the websites that are showing reviews about your business and respond accordingly. Again, be sure to thank happy customers for their review. This goes a long way when others are reviewing the comments.

If there are negative comments, do your best to understand where the customer is coming from and offer to make things right. Donâ??t lose your cool, as this can reflect poorly on you by others who are monitoring.

3. **Increase Your Google Visibility**
One of the not-so-obvious benefits of having online reviews is their direct impact on how Google ranks your business in its search engine result pages (SERPs). Googleâ??s goal is to provide its customers (people searching online) with the best possible experiences and SERPs. To that end, it sees businesses with a significant number of four and five-star reviews as â??goodâ?• and rewards them accordingly by showing those businesses higher up on the Google page.

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What this means is that positive customer reviews are an increasingly important factor in Search Engine Optimization â?? the process of improving where your website shows in the Google rankings. All things being equal in terms of a websiteâ??s content, Google will likely show a website with more online reviews higher up than a website without many reviews. Again, Google is all about showing whatâ??s best for the person doing the Google search.

Take Action Today
Evaluate your online presence or ask a digital marketing agency to provide an audit of your search engine visibility. Chances are you are not fully taking advantage of online reviews and their ability to help you show higher in Google searches. For example, the words that customers use in their reviews matter when it comes to increasing your Google rankings. A review such as â??John Smith company did an excellent job installing our new hardwood floors in Arlingtonâ?• is more effective than â??John Smith company did a great job and we are very happy with them.â?• Those keywords â??hardwood floors in Arlingtonâ?• have a benefit and signal to Google that the business receiving this positive rating performs a certain type of service in a specific location. That can help your website show higher in the Google results.

The Takeaway: When it comes getting more clients, buyers and sellers, what others think of you is critical. Online reviews play an increasingly vital role in how we shop, research, evaluate and hire businesses. Provide your happy customers with a means to sing your praises online and youâ??ll be on your way to showing higher on Google and growing your business.

If you need help with your website or digital marketing strategy, letâ??s connect. Dalton Digital is an award-winning Arlington-based web design agency that helps small businesses by designing stunning websites and driving growth through search engine marketing and digital strategy.

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Justin Gooderham is the Founder and Principal of Dalton Digital in Arlington, VA. His agency helps Title Companies and other Small Businesses grow their business and build their brand by designing stunning websites and attracting more clients from Google searches and Social Media. A native of the Washington, D.C. area, Justin has spent his 17-year career driving online growth for businesses. Prior to founding Dalton Digital, Justin worked for Intuit, maker of QuickBooks for small businesses, and Accenture Consulting â?? where he managed numerous website launches and digital marketing campaigns.

Category

1. Digital Marketing

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vltaexaminer