

How to stay afloat when fake online reviews could sink your business

 By [Daniella Shapiro](#)

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Fake news is a pervasive epidemic. Insidious distortion of truth, fueled by hidden (or blatant) agendas is now accepted as a fact of life.



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The media is saturated with misinformation. But self-seeking, targeted manipulation of information platforms, which are intended to be enlightening and helpful to consumers can get really personal. Fake negative business reviews aimed at bringing down the competition are a threat to the livelihoods of entrepreneurs working hard to get small businesses off the ground.

Virtual lynch mob

Your business's rating is steady at a healthy and justified 4.8. Within hours it plummets to a 2.0. You have been spammed by a host of negative ratings, some not even substantiated by comments. At the same time, you see your competitor's ratings are suddenly flourishing.

This scenario is becoming increasingly common. Large-scale corporations may be able to absorb the blows. However, when jealousy between smaller businesses leads to malicious targeting, there can be serious financial consequences for those in the firing line.

Fake negative reviews can seriously affect a business's credibility in the eyes of both current and potential customers. This is because consumers read reviews, are largely persuaded by them, and generally can't tell if a review is genuine or fake.

Camouflaged culprits

According to a 2017 consumer study by BrightLocal, 85% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations. 94% said that an online review convinced them to avoid a business. 73% said positive reviews led them to trust a local business more. 79% of consumers had read fake reviews during the past year, but 84% were unable to

detect that a review is fake.

Google's own web analytics are unable to successfully distinguish between genuine and false reviews. All that is required to leave a review is that the reviewer has had a 'customer experience' with your business, which is a very open-ended catch-all. Fakers can easily slip through this net.

Furthermore, by the end of 2017, an estimated 267 million Facebook users were fake or duplicates. #Fakebook. This is a shocking statistic which indicates how untraceable activity is facilitated. There is no risk attached in defaming a competitor when you aren't even 'real'.



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Flushing out the fakers

There are steps you can take to defend your business and restore your reputation. Logically, a fake review does not have any foundation in truth and is not supported by any actual experience of your business. This lack of substance is your weapon and can help you to detect a fake review, which is the first step to be taken in righting the wrong against you.

Spot the difference

Fake reviews do have certain characteristics that can help you to detect them. A tell-tale sign is the use of an overly aggressive tone and language. General criticisms without specific examples or references to events or user experiences that have taken place are a dead giveaway. It is also likely that you may notice a flood of excessively positive reviews given to a competitor business over a short span of time in an attempt to generate hype.

Step 1: Report

A calm and methodical approach is important to maintain your business's integrity. Do not respond with a furious counter-attack. This will only do further harm to your business's reputation by adding fuel to the fire. Steps should be taken to report the fake reviews.

On Google, if you place your cursor over the review, a flag icon will appear which you can click. A violation page will open where you can enter your email address and select the type of violation. Contact Google Support via your Google My Business Dashboard or Tweet them directly if this method does not lead to a speedy rectification. On Facebook, click on the icon in the top right corner of the review and select 'Report Post'.

Step 2: Respond

A professional response to the review is imperative to repair your credibility. Your response will carry more weight in the minds of consumers than the negative attack. It is important to refrain from introducing further negativity in your reply. Politely question the review by drawing attention to the fact that the reviewer's experience or actual use of your product is dubious. Extend an invitation to the reviewer to directly contact your business for personal assistance.

Step 3: Reveal

Go public. Share your experience via social media. This open and honest approach is likely to generate support and positive ratings. Customers will appreciate the very real and human element to what you are dealing with. Do not shy away from reviews because of a bad experience. Instead, encourage customers to leave more reviews. This will show how much you believe in the quality of your business and product.

Rise above

Turn your negative experience into an opportunity for growth and increased consumer support. Rack up those positive ratings to show your business is made of stronger stuff than a pitiful fake attack. You know that those negative ratings are not based in reality. This should encourage you to continue improving and enhancing the consumer experience you are offering.

Maintain open communication with consumers and continue to build trust through integrity, transparency and reliability.

ABOUT DANIELLA SHAPIRO

Daniella Shapiro is Founder and CEO of DaniellaShapiro.com, a consulting company on the front lines of marketing, social media and branding strategies. Daniella recently launched the Oolala Collection Club, an e-commerce proudly South African, unisex, cutting-edge skincare and lifestyle brand. 100% Cruelty-Free. 100% Paraben Free. 100% Vegan. 0% Questionable. Oolala Collection Club stands for respecting our planet and affordable luxury.

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