

How to Handle Negative Google Funeral Reviews

By Welton Hong



It's never easy for any business owner when their firm gets a negative Google review—and for funeral homes, it can be especially affecting. It's hard not to take the criticism personally, and a negative review can be far more debilitating to a funeral home's reputation than it is in other industries.

But that's no reason to ignore reviews themselves, as much as that might seem easier. Google reviews, and reviews in general, are powerful online marketing tools.

Almost all people (97 percent) read reviews for local businesses before making a decision about goods and services. And they use those reviews as fodder for purchasing decisions; 90 percent say positive reviews impact buying decisions, and more than 85 percent say negative reviews do too.

With so much riding on reviews, keeping an eye on them and managing them is synonymous with managing your online reputation. It's a good idea to take an interactive, proactive approach to reviews on all the major sites, but if you only have bandwidth to tackle one on a regular basis, Google is your best bet.

Google reviews are tied to search engine results, and your funeral home's Google star rating is often prominently placed in map and Google My Business results.

Given how much first impressions matter, you certainly don't want a poor Google star rating weighing you down. At the same time, even funeral homes with stellar customer service reputations and a bevy of qualified, experienced staff members won't please everyone all of the time.

Less-than-stellar reviews happen occasionally for legitimate reasons, and they happen more often for illegitimate ones. Here's what you need to know to deal with both:

Dealing with Legitimate Negative Reviews

For this purpose, legitimate negative reviews are defined as any low-star review coming from a person to whom you actually provided service. You might (or might not) feel the content in the review itself is warranted, but it's not a *fake* review in that it didn't come from a bot, a competitor, or an actual client or family.

Here are some best-practice steps for turning a negative review into a positive word-of-mouth marketing situation:

1. Start by reaching out privately to the individual to resolve the issue. Sometimes, negative reviews are a result of misunderstandings, and taking the step to make things right can shift the wind in your favor. Once you resolve the situation and the individual seems satisfied with the outcome, consider asking if they will update the review. When potential clientele see this activity on review sites, they know that you're a firm of caring, professional people who want to do a good job for those they serve.
2. Next, leave a public message letting the reviewer (and others) know that you have reached out. This way, if the person never responds or a resolution isn't reached, other people see that you are responding to situations and care.
3. If all else fails, leave a response to the review with your side of the story. Always take a respectful, tactful tone, but let others know the truth about what services you provided or how the situation occurred, especially if it was not your or your employee's fault.

Responding to reviews makes your funeral home appear more human in an industry that thrives on human contact and care. But do remember that sympathies may automatically lean to the clientele when others consider a funeral services review, so be kind and thoughtful in how you respond.

Dealing with Fake Reviews

While it certainly hurts to see that someone wasn't happy with your services, it can be even more frustrating to face fake reviews.

And they're more common than you might think: About 75 percent of people have seen one or more fake review online in the past year, and that only accounts for fake reviews that could be identified as such.

Why would anyone leave fake reviews? They can be attacks from competitors willing to engage in black-hat marketing tactics, internet trolls who simply don't have better things to do, or someone who has a grudge against your firm. But you don't have to sit passively and take these attacks. Here's how to fight back:

1. First, conduct some due diligence. Make sure this actually **is** a fake review. Remember, just because you don't like it doesn't necessarily make it fake.
2. If it **is** fake, leave a response to the review noting that you don't have a record of serving this person or asking the reviewer to contact you so you can respond to the situation. Obviously, you're not waiting on a fake reviewer to reach out, but taking the high road in a public forum lets others see that you're professional and care about providing quality service.

3. Flag the review and report it as fake. You can do this via your Google My Business dashboard.
4. Ask other people to flag the review too. Google doesn't even look at the review until five or more people have flagged it, so ask your employees or trusted family members to log into their own Google accounts for this purpose. It only takes a minute to flag a false review.

Flagging the review doesn't automatically mean it will be removed. Google looks at the review and decides whether to remove it. But following the steps above and ensuring you've done everything you can to publicly show you're handling things on your end can help impact Google's decision.

Moving on From Negative Reviews

Not every negative review becomes a positive opportunity, and not every fake review goes away. And that's okay, because your star level on Google doesn't need to be perfect to inspire trust and confidence in individuals and families looking for death care services.

Instead of dwelling on the negative review that can't be changed, do what you can to foster good reviews to tip the scales in your favor. Tactfully encourage families who were satisfied with your services to leave reviews.

When it comes to being found online or fostering trust in consumers, having a lot of reviews that are mostly (but not necessarily all) positive is a more powerful position than having just a few reviews, even if they're all perfect.



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Welton is a leading expert in helping funeral homes convert leads from online directly to the phone line. He's the author of the book *Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes*. Learn more at FuneralHomeProfits.com.

