

# How to respond to negative reviews and online feedback

The insight and advice you need to handle critical customer comments



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# Introduction

Let’s be real. No matter how hard you work to deliver a 5-star customer experience, 1-star reviews happen. The negative feedback might be warranted — maybe the customer received the wrong item or a defective product. It could also be due to an issue beyond your control — the item didn’t fit or match their style.

Either way, you have an unhappy customer on your hands.

How you choose to respond to criticism speaks volumes about your brand values

How you choose to respond to their criticism speaks volumes about your brand values. The wrong reply can come across as combative or defensive and even do more harm than the original review or social media post. But the right reply can show the original commenter — and anyone else who reads their review or post — that your company is proactive, genuine, and committed to customer service.

Almost every product, brand, and company out there has received at least one negative review, if not more. When the iPhone was launched in 2007, several top tech sites called it “a major disappointment.” They complained it was “fundamentally flawed” because no buyer would want to surf the web, listen to music, and make calls on the same device.<sup>1</sup> Boy, were they wrong.

**Instead of trying to hide from negative feedback, brands should embrace it.**

The first step is learning how to look at customer criticism in a new light. Ahead, you’ll learn how to respond to negative reviews and online feedback in a positive way. We’ll also show you how to leverage critical feedback to improve your customer experience, build trust with shoppers, and convert more browsers into buyers.

# How negative reviews and online feedback help your business



Displaying all your reviews — good or bad — will help you maintain transparency. It shows that you have nothing to hide.

INC.COM<sup>2</sup>



# Transparency builds authenticity

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When someone wants to learn more about your brand, product, or service, they turn to your reviews. Most shoppers view real-life customer feedback as one of the most trustworthy sources of information. In fact, almost 85% of shoppers say they value online reviews as much as a personal recommendation from a friend or family member.<sup>3</sup>

When scanning your reviews, potential customers expect to see a mix of feedback. They understand that there's no such thing as a perfect product or cure-all solution.<sup>4</sup>

**If all of your online reviews are excessively positive, shoppers tend to grow suspicious. They may assume that the content is either fake or that potentially critical feedback has been moderated out.<sup>4</sup>**

A few negative reviews won't drive potential customers away. If anything, they'll do the opposite. 93% of shoppers said they would rather purchase a product with a lot of positive and negative reviews compared to a product with no reviews.<sup>4</sup>

Across the Bazaarvoice Network of more than 11,500 brands and retailers, we've actually seen that products with at least some negative reviews have higher conversion rates than those with a perfect 5-star rating.<sup>4</sup>

**93%**  
of shoppers would rather purchase a product with a lot of positive and negative reviews compared to a product with no reviews.<sup>4</sup>

# View customer feedback as an opportunity for growth

When someone criticizes us, it's natural to become defensive. Especially if the feedback feels unjustified, insulting, or inaccurate.

But many negative reviews can be used to your advantage. By understanding your customers' pain points, you have an opportunity to address them head-on.

For example – Vertbaudet, a leading European retailer of baby and children's clothes, shoes, maternity wear, school wear, and nursery items, learned of an area for improvement for one of their products from negative reviews.



★★★★☆

"Very pretty, quality fabric.  
**Small size because zipper at chest level.** I had to take two sizes above my usual size to fit in and be comfortable."

**ANONYMOUS**  
**3 MONTHS AGO**

**vertbaudet**

**Improved with your reviews**

After a measurement campaign carried out with future mothers, our clothes are now worn in your usual size until the end of your pregnancy!

Feedback from customers through user-generated content (UGC) surfaced the need for the retailer to adjust the design of a certain maternity outfit to improve the fit, as many customers commented that the dress was too small. Alerted by repeated reviews of this issue, Vertbaudet responded by reassessing the measurements of the maternity dress and fixed the cut.

In another case, reviews helped Vertbaudet improve the storage space of a furniture item, as customers expressed a desire to have larger drawers. The retailer redesigned the product, and the average customer rating increased considerably.<sup>5</sup>

“

People who post negative reviews of your business are doing you a favor: They're telling you about a weakness that may be costing you customers.

FORBES<sup>6</sup>



# Build trust with potential customers

When a brand responds to a review, be it positive or negative, both past and future shoppers pay attention.

1/3

expect some sort of public response from brands after posting a review or sharing feedback<sup>7</sup>

87%

expect the brand to do something after receiving a negative review, whether it's replying or offering a discount on future purchases<sup>7</sup>

72%

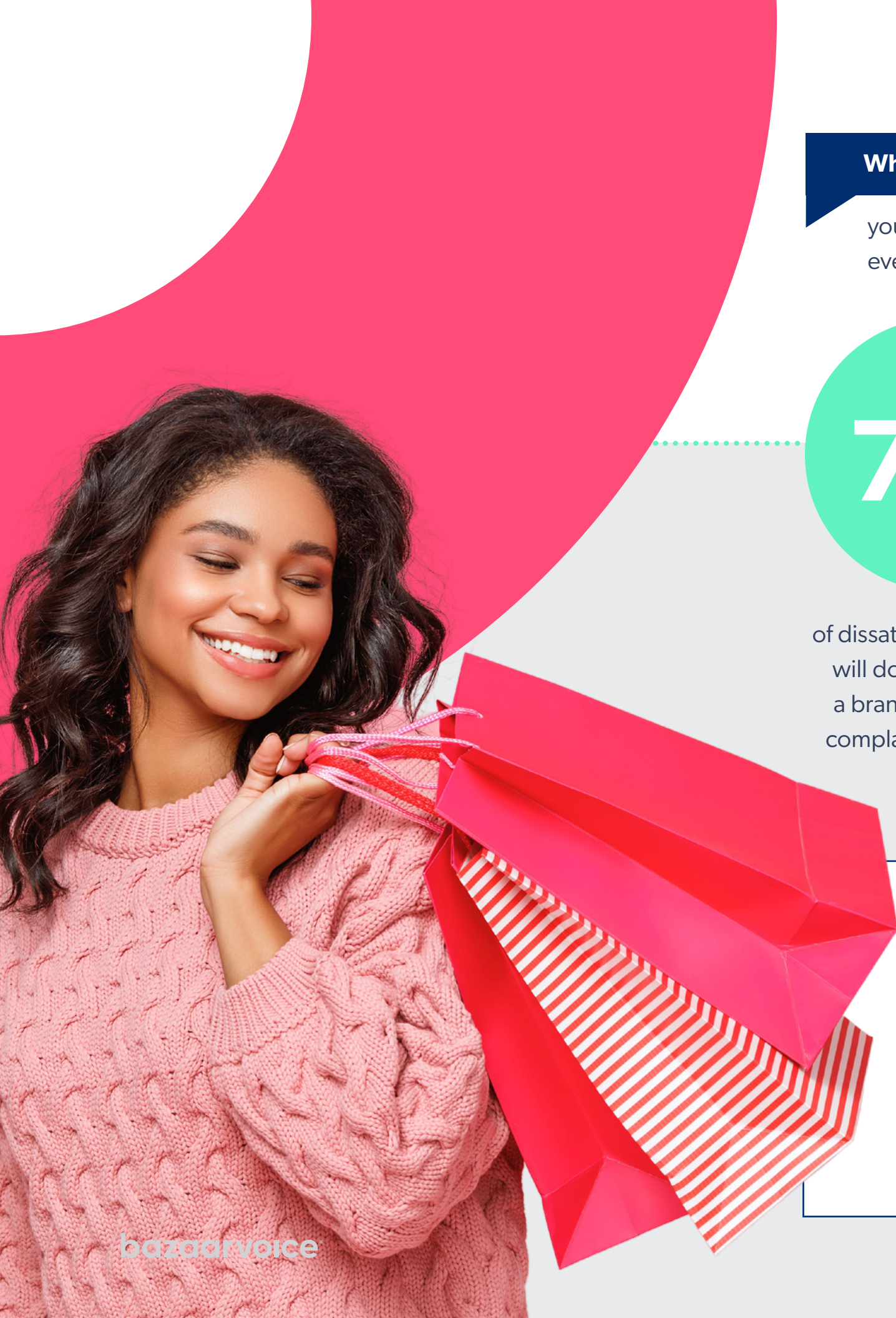
expect a similar response to positive reviews<sup>7</sup>



Brands that take the time to respond to customer comments — good and bad — receive more reviews and enjoy a higher overall rating than those that don't.

**HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW<sup>8</sup>**





**When you respond promptly and politely to an unhappy customer,**

you have the opportunity to make a positive impression on them — as well as everyone who reads the exchange.

**70%**

of dissatisfied customers will do business with a brand again if their complaint is resolved<sup>9</sup>

**34%**

of customers who receive a satisfactory reply to their complaint will delete their original negative review<sup>7</sup>

**2x**

increase in the likelihood of product purchase when the brand responds to a negative review<sup>7</sup>

## THE LESSON

Don't ignore bad reviews and negative commentary. Instead, use them as an opportunity to satisfy or win back an unhappy customer and show future shoppers you're committed to making things right.

A large, bold, pink number 8 is positioned on the left side of the slide, set against a teal background.

# ways to respond to negative reviews and online feedback

Now that you see how positive a negative review can be, you're ready to start crafting replies that restore the relationship with unhappy customers and build trust with potential buyers.

Here are eight tips to help you do just that — plus example replies you can implement right away.

# 1 Respond immediately and politely

Responding to a negative review within 24 to 48 hours demonstrates a sense of urgency. It shows you take the complaint seriously and are eager to make things right.

**Q:**

How much time does it take to respond to reviews?

**A:**

For every 50 reviews you receive (of any rating) we recommend setting aside an hour to research, write, and edit your responses.<sup>11</sup>

Remember, no matter the context of the negative feedback, it's important to stay positive and polite. Never blame the customer (no matter how much you think it's their fault), and always thank them for their input.

On social media, the stakes are even higher. When a shopper leaves a negative review on your website, that review stays contained. But if an unhappy customer tags your brand on Twitter and complains, the issue could go viral, resulting in a much bigger problem than one negative review. That's why it's important to stay on top of any social activity related to your brand. Be ready to respond to posts quickly — and be willing to admit fault and take action, if necessary.

# 91%

of shoppers say a brand should respond to social media posts the same day that they're posted. About 60% expect a response within the first few hours of their initial post.<sup>7</sup>





Hi Pat. We're so sorry your headphones were chipped when they arrived. It must have been frustrating to not be able to use them right away. We know how annoying it is to wait for a product — only to find it unusable upon arrival.



## Show empathy

Start your reply by acknowledging what the customer went through. Rephrase their original complaint in your own words and show that you understand their frustration — regardless of whether they're your brand's fault.

### **This makes the customer feel heard.**

The same language can also be used on social media. Just remember to keep your reply to less than 280 characters on Twitter, which has a strict word count.



**Brand**



Hi Pat. Oh no! We're sorry to hear your purchase didn't arrive on time. That's so disappointing. We've updated the shipping estimates on our website so this doesn't happen again.

# 3 Acknowledge and empathize



## Brand

Hi Pat. Oh no! I am sorry to hear your cat didn't like our premium blend wet food. We are known for our high-quality, vet-approved pet food, so this came as a surprise and was upsetting to hear.



If your company made a mistake, own up to it. Say you're sorry and explain what you'll do in the future to ensure problems like this one don't happen again. Your response should position you as a true customer advocate.

If the customer is complaining about a problem that's beyond your control, even a simple "we're sorry to hear you had a bad experience" offers a chance to apologize, without accepting the blame. But, be sure that you're genuine in your apology. You want your customer to feel understood and acknowledged.

You can also use your apology as an opportunity to highlight what customers can expect from your brand.



Due to questionable data management practices and corporate scandals, consumer trust is at an all-time low. Brands that reply to negative feedback in a genuine and credible manner demonstrate authenticity and increase their chances of earning consumer loyalty.<sup>12</sup>

## 4 Be genuine

Whatever you do, don't copy and paste a standard cookie-cutter response to every negative review. Even if your messaging is the same, find ways to keep it fresh for each response.

You can do this by using the reviewer's name or nickname in your response and, as we suggested earlier, rephrasing their complaint in your own words.

While you'll have fewer characters in a Twitter reply or Instagram comment than a review response on your site, find ways to switch up your replies – no one wants to read a wall of "We're sorry to hear that! Please DM us" on their feeds.

# 5 Keep it simple

As tempting as it is to argue every point — especially if the review is insulting or contains factual errors — your best bet is to keep your reply short and sweet.

When it comes to responding to negative reviews, less is more. Keep your reply to three or four sentences.

Going into too much detail can come across as defensive or desperate. Shoppers may also lose interest in longer replies.

In your reply, avoid asking follow-up questions. You don't want to encourage an unhappy customer to elaborate more on their negative experience in the public domain.

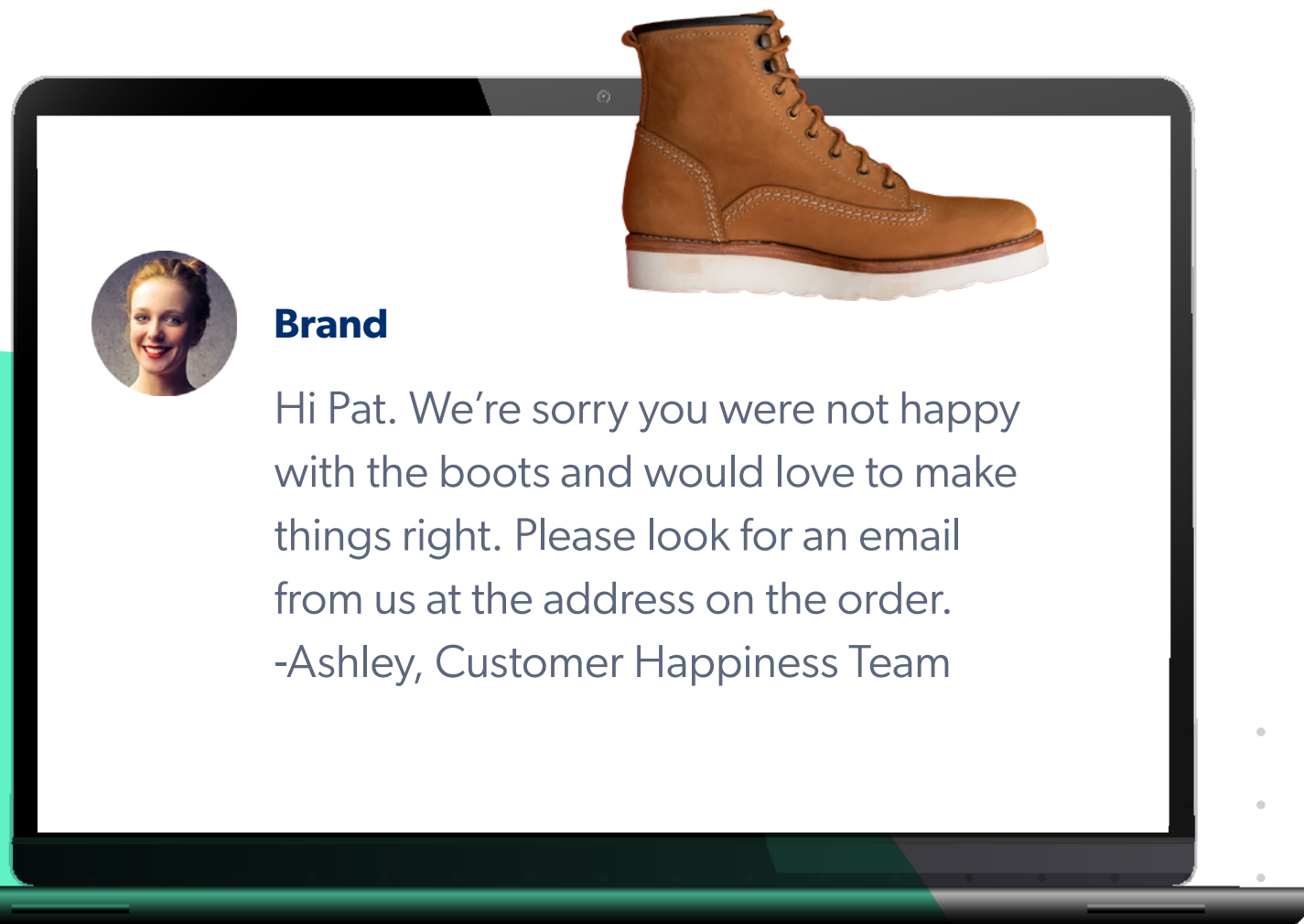


**Brand.com**

To: patcustomer@email.com

Hi Pat,  
I'm sorry to hear you were unhappy with your shoe purchase. It's so frustrating to fall in love with an item online and then realize it doesn't fit when it arrives. The good news is we offer a wide range of sizes. Here's a link to our True Fit chart — hopefully that helps you find your perfect pair!

Here's how  
we'd incorporate  
all of the above tips  
into one reply:



## 6 Connect 1:1

Odds are you won't be able to resolve the customer's issue if you keep your reply short and sweet and avoid asking any follow-up questions. That's why we recommend you offer to take the conversation offline.

In your reply, provide a phone number or email address where the customer can reach you. Bonus points if you can provide the name of a specific customer service representative. One key thing – make sure the customer will actually reach a human in a timely manner, not just an inbox where their request will sit for days or weeks.

To other shoppers, this shows that your brand is open to feedback and takes customer concerns seriously. To the reviewer, it turns the encounter from an anonymous reply to an opportunity for a 1-on-1 conversation.

On social media, you can also follow up with the person via a private message or direct message (DM) on Twitter. Just let them know publicly that you'll be sending a note — that lets other customers see you're committed to making things right. That being said, make sure you or a team member actually follows up. Nothing's worse than a brand declaring publicly they'll be reaching out, but your inbox stays empty.

# 7 Prioritize feedback

If you're a small team, keeping up with feedback can be overwhelming. We get it. To help you prioritize your efforts, we suggest starting with either your most popular products or the items with the most reviews. Alternatively, you may want to focus on new products that are part of upcoming promotions.

In either case, filter down to the 1- and 2-star ratings. These reviews likely contain strongly-worded feedback from impassioned customers. That's where you find the good stuff.

As you're reviewing the 1- and 2-star reviews, look for themes. Are most of the complaints about a specific feature? Or did the customer have problems with shipping and/or delivery? Keep a log of any recurring topics you notice.





# 8 Use negative feedback for good

Once you've identified what triggered the current negative reviews, you can start getting ahead of future ones.

In some cases, you might be able to simply update the product description to manage customers' expectations. Building out an FAQ page can also help you stay ahead of complaints.

But sometimes the problem is bigger than that. You may have to strategize with your product team to improve the item or talk to your customer success team to identify ways to improve the user experience. In some cases, brands have had to go back to the drawing board and create a brand new solution.

Using negative feedback to identify areas for improvement not only shows current customers you're listening, but helps pave the way for a better experience for future customers.

## What about negative feedback on social media?

Building and maintaining a social media presence is a full-time job. If that team member is also in charge of responding to negative reviews, it can be more than a full-time job.

We recommend empowering your social media manager with the time and resources to respond to negative reviews in a thoughtful and effective manner. The effort will be worth it.

Take as thorough of an approach with social media feedback as you are with your product reviews, and customers will notice. This is an opportunity to elevate the customer experience and simultaneously learn more about your brand.



# 3 takeaways for responding to online feedback

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Bad reviews happen to the best of brands. But, with the right approach, you can leverage them to your advantage. It's all about perspective.

Empower your brand to respond to even the most critical comments in a positive, authentic, and effective manner:

## 1

### **Find the positive**

When reading reviews, shoppers expect to see a few less-than-perfect ratings. Products with at least some negative reviews have higher conversion rates than those with a perfect rating. Critical feedback builds authenticity and can be used to improve the shopper experience.

## 2

### **Don't ignore the critical**

Regardless of the nature of the original comment, shoppers pay attention when a brand responds. Use your reply to show that you're committed to customer service. It will build trust with the original reviewer as well as anyone else who reads the exchange.

## 3

### **Keep it short and sweet**

Address the complaint right away. Show empathy to the reviewer's experience. Apologize. Take time to understand and acknowledge the feedback. If needed, offer to take the conversation offline to resolve the issue.

**Want more tips?  
Find out why brands  
like yours rely on us  
to create smarter  
shopping experiences.**

**[Learn more](#)**

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