

ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Fact Sheet for Businesses

Brought to you by



**ST.PETE
CLEARWATER**

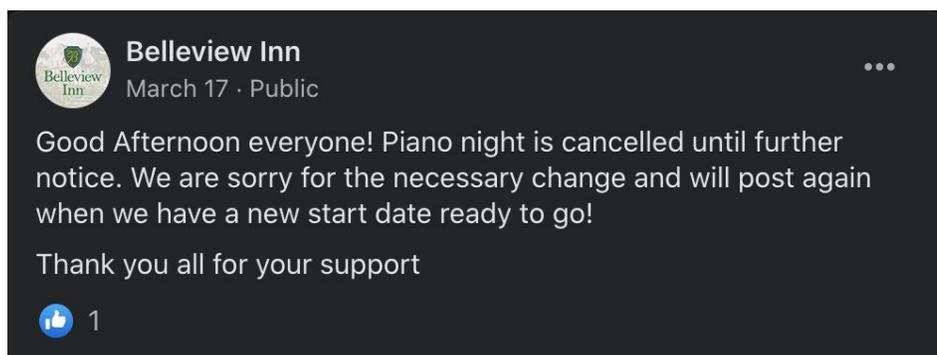
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Share the Latest Updates: Staying Ahead of Customer Questions

During these unprecedented times, it's essential to respond to questions and comments that arise about your business on social media platforms, in emails and on review sites. You can alleviate concerns and answer questions that your potential customers may have by being proactive with the latest information about your business. It may be a question as simple as "Is this business open?" Head off customer concerns and frustration by keeping information about your business (such as hours, delivery delays or new operating procedures) updated frequently.

- **Social Media:** Share changes in operations, hours, delays, etc. Pin your post or tweet on Facebook and Twitter. Publish your post on Facebook; click the three dots in the upper right hand corner of the post; select "Pin to Top of Page" so that it's always visible.



- **Review Sites:** Update descriptions, posts, hours and services on Yelp, Tripadvisor and Google My Business listings.
- **Website:** Add a FAQ (frequently asked questions) page or a pop-up on your homepage with business updates so that all customers are immediately aware of updated policies and operating hours.
- **Email:** Send a timely email to your community sharing these updates.

As the situation around COVID-19 continues to change, don't leave your customers in the dark. Create honest and realistic expectations to reduce friction and keep your community informed. This can help minimize negative reviews and set realistic expectations for your customers.

How to Respond:

Tips for Customer Communication

How consumers perceive your business, otherwise known as reputation management, can influence whether or not someone will purchase your products or services. This perception can come from various sources including Google reviews, comments on Facebook, mentions on Twitter and any other form of public opinion about your business.

Whether you're receiving glowing five-star feedback or one-star reviews, it's important to respond to both types of commentary and on as many platforms as possible. Responding to negative reviews can mitigate damage to your reputation and create an opportunity to win back customers. Responding to positive reviews can encourage more reviews and even impact your local search results (in the case of Google reviews). In both scenarios, businesses have the opportunity to build customer loyalty (and revenue) while sharing relevant information. A recent study shows that 97% of customers read businesses' responses to responses to reviews, up from 89% in 2018. (BrightLocal, 2019).

Here are a few tips for communicating with and responding to your customers during COVID-19:

- Use sensitive language. Don't suggest your products or services are essential, and avoid language that creates a false sense of urgency (ex. stock up, limited supply, etc.).
- Respond in real-time or as quickly as possible. As circumstances surrounding health and safety change in your market, expect your customers to ask questions more frequently.
- Actively monitor social media platforms and review sites. Don't let negative reviews or misinformation from customers impact your business.

This can be a productive time to learn what your customers want and how your business can adapt to meet those needs and improve customer satisfaction—both now and when business goes back to normal.

What to Share: Ways to Adapt Your Social Media Strategy

Seek to inspire and inform during this difficult time. Adapt your social media strategy to reflect new circumstances and changing audience interests.

Know Your Audience

Social media can connect you to people all over the world. Because your audience is in many locations, be sensitive to the fact that audience sentiment, severity of cases and local government regulations vary greatly. When posting content, consider the mental state of your audience and be aware that they are on a spectrum ranging from cautious to careless. Dig into your analytics to learn more about your audience demographics and geographic locations, determine shifts in peak engagement times and gain insight into what type of content your business should be sharing.

Knowing who your audience is will influence how to adapt your social media strategy. And for all types of audiences, keep the following points in mind when sharing content on social media:

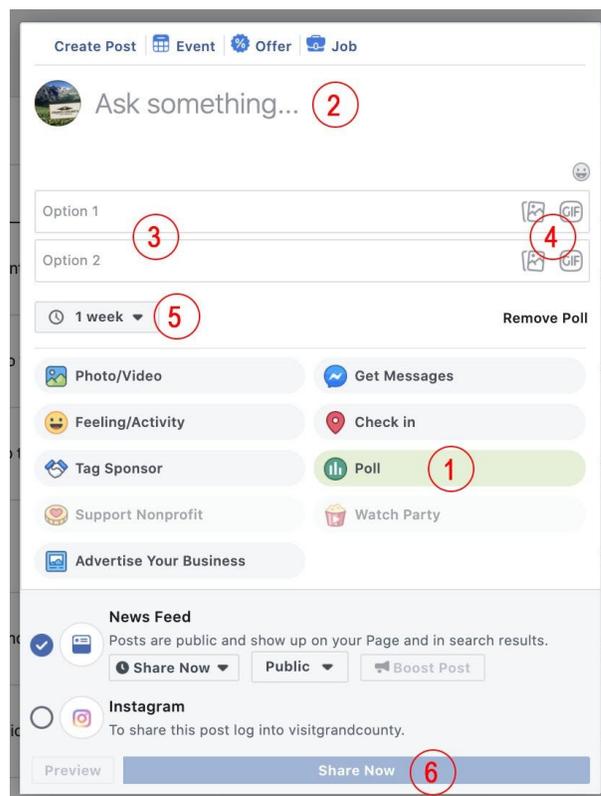
- **Avoid images with crowds.** Older images may feature large crowds; make sure the images you share reflect the new reality. It's better to be cautious than tone-deaf.
- **Don't schedule out content far in advance.** Prevent contradicting the news cycle by scheduling content week by week.
- **Balance content types.** Strike a balance between your traditional strategy and adapted strategy.

Get Creative and Offer Alternatives

Channel your time and available resources into creative campaigns and alternative ways of operating your business. It's a great time to test out new social media features, new creative and even content types such as videos, live streaming, virtual tours, polls or hashtag campaigns. Try something new and discover what your audience responds to.

Polls are one interesting opportunity to engage directly with customers. Get input on new products or services, test ideas or get their opinions. When creating a post 1) select "Poll" in the drop-down; 2) type your question; 3) add options; 4) attach an image or gif; 5) set how long you want the poll to run for; 6) post and wait for results to come in!

Since business may be slower than usual, offer alternative ways to continue operating or encourage future business. Move your inventory online, promote gift cards, host a virtual event, utilize mobile pay options or expand your delivery area. Create alternative solutions for your community to continue using your services or products.



Share Positive Stories and Inspire

Businesses can use their social media platforms as a source of inspiration and positivity when the state of the world seems uncertain to many. Even if your business has temporarily closed, maintain a presence by sharing images that spread hope for the future or uplifting stories about ways your community or business is giving back. If resources are limited, consider curating user-generated content which can equally engage and inspire while reminding users of your brand.

Platform Updates & Resources

Facebook

Facebook's COVID-19 Information Center provides users with curated news updates and resources. Facebook also launched the COVID-19 Community Help page where any user can request or offer help. And more specifically for businesses and organizations, Facebook released a

guide for media partners with tools and tips on how to utilize the social media platform during these times — downloadable [here](#).

Twitter

Twitter recently conducted a survey of U.S. users, sharing new insights and ways businesses can adapt their social media strategy. For example, 70% of respondents said that businesses should share positive stories on the platform while 52% of respondents agreed that advertising offers a sense of normalcy.

Yelp, Google, Tripadvisor

Review sites including Yelp, Google and Tripadvisor have made updates to their platforms in order to help businesses during these uncertain times. From virtual services to COVID-19 post updates, learn more about Yelp's COVID-19 response. Google has continued to make updates to its Google My Business features including the ability to post and respond to reviews.

Each platform has slightly different policies on reviews however, best practices for owners/employees responding to reviews within these platforms follow similar paths. Adding your contact details is optional, but we strongly encourage you to include them so that potential guests can easily contact you with any follow-up questions. Offering deals and discounts to negative or positive reviews publicly can be detrimental to your business as it can encourage reviews to lack authenticity. Using a business-related e-mail account rather than a personal account to differentiate the personal reviews/ experiences on your account from the responses to reviews associated with your businesses assists in maintaining a professional “storefront” for these platforms.

On Tripadvisor, the minimum character count for your message is 25 characters and the maximum limit is 1,000. Learn more about best practices and updates to GMB. Check out updated review guidelines, gift card features and additional resources from TripAdvisor [here](#).