

Six Steps to Respond to Negative Online Reviews - From a Legal Perspective



Lawyer specialized in tourism gives her advice

A commercial lawyer with experience in travel, tourism and hospitality issues, has shared with an online gathering of travel and tourism leaders her effective steps to dealing with negative online reviews.

Addressing a 23 August MyTravelResearch.com webinar of travel industry leaders, many of them from small businesses, Alyssa Antcliffe, the principal of Antcliffes Legal, told tourism industry leaders and brand managers that having an online presence and being accessible through online platforms is essential in today's digital world.

The digital economy has been built on ratings and reviews to enable people to 'window shop' online. However, it only takes one disgruntled former client or customer to ruin a good reputation by posting a negative review, no matter how false or misleading that review might be, she said.

Antcliffe added that, usually, what is published online is not intended to be malicious, but is someone's honestly held opinion.

"In these circumstances, if a comment is substantially true, or represents the honestly held opinion of the reviewer, then a business will have difficulty in bringing a successful defamation claim," she said.

Antcliffe suggested that if you believe that you or your business is the victim of unfair, untrue and or defamatory remarks as a result of an online review you should act quickly to minimise the damage.

She suggested six strategies designed to help minimise damage and avoid costly legal proceedings:

1. Contact the website which has published the review to ask that the material be removed,
2. Contact the client or customer who has left the review and try to resolve the issue that has arisen,
3. Request that the client or customer remove the review or write a further positive review about the way the issue has been handled and resolved,
4. Write a short and factual online response to the review addressing the issue, or inform the public that the reviewer's comments are unfounded and what the facts are,
5. Update your website, publish an article, run a promotion or launch a new product. The aim here is to create online news and chatter that will divert attention from the negative review and add new positive reviews and announcements, and/or
6. Seek independent legal advice.

Depending on the issue being raised in a review you may wish to consult a lawyer first. They will be able to advise whether it would be appropriate to involve the authorities such as Fair Trading, the police or courts.

Antcliffe made clear that the six strategies were not intended to be relied on as legal advice as further consideration of each individual's circumstances should always be thought through before

any action is taken.

Also in the webinar, Carolyn Childs, co-founder of MyTravelResearch.com, said it was vital not to respond to reviews while angry. Make the effort to be unemotional, level headed and empathetic when responding.

Childs noted that an online response that addresses a complaint in a cool and reasonable way often transforms the negative review into a marketing positive for the travel brand.

Research by BrightLocal shows that if your star rating increases from two to three stars on review sites, business goes up by around 33%.

If you have any legal queries or are concerned about negative reviews you should contact your lawyer, said Antcliffe.

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Media queries

At MyTravelResearch.com Australia:

- Carolyn Childs (mobile): (+61) 416 213 962; Carolyn@mytravelresearch.com
- Bronwyn White (mobile): (+61) 408 225 766; Bronwyn@mytravelresearch.com

Antcliffes Legal - Alyssa Antcliffe. Alyssa@antcliffes.com.au; Tel +61 (02) 9327 2732

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MyTravelResearch.com is a market research and marketing firm specializing in the travel, tourism and aviation industries. Its specialty is providing insights that are actionable.

Founded by principals with lifetime careers in travel, tourism and aviation, MyTravelResearch.com exists to build the visitor economy and successful tourism businesses. It does this by putting the voice of the customer and best practice business thinking into an easy to implement, hands-on approach via an innovative membership model. MyTravelResearch.com can help:

* National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) meet the expectations of their industry by acting as an extension of their research and marketing resources?

* Businesses make more informed decisions. (It is like having your own research and/or marketing team)

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Additional media queries

ScottAsia Communications — Asia Pacific office:

Tel. (+66) [0] 2160 2644 (Ann Sriwongsa)

Email: ann@scottasia.net

UK office: Tel. (+44) [0] 7949 077959 (Ken Scott)

Email: kens@scottasia.net