

Attorney Online Reviews: To Respond or Not to Respond, That Is the Question

By Tom Caffrey

If it's a good review, the answer is easy.

Respond as the business owner, say 'Thank you'. If you read Google online help, it plainly states that good reviews help your search result rankings and responding as the business owner, also helps as it shows active engagement with your client. In my managed database of over 1500 law firm reviews, I calculated a 2% response rate. We coach our law firm clients to give Google what it wants, respond to your good reviews.

The answer for a bad review is more nuanced.

We offer some suggestions below for how to deal with haters and, in case you do respond, some real-world examples. As George Bernard Shaw stated:

"I learned long ago, never to wrestle with a pig. You get dirty, and besides, the pig likes it."

If you are thinking of responding to an online review:

1. Before responding, read the review more than once
2. Wait 24 hours and re-read your initial reply
3. Print out your reply and if you have any doubts ceremoniously burn it
4. Discuss a bad review with another business associate, have a good laugh

If you do respond:

1. Be empathetic. The customer(client) is always right, even when they are wrong. If appropriate own up to any deficiency and explain how you have corrected it.
2. Be helpful. Try to offer a solution.
3. Show some humanity. You are speaking not only to this reviewer, but to all future readers.
4. Turn a negative into a positive. Explain your standards of service, history of providing service in your community and commitment to quality.
5. State that you are legally bound to NOT discuss confidential details of any clients' matter in a public forum and then offer a private off-line discussion.

Examples:

1. In a Forbes 'Handling Haters' article (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sage/2014/03/03/handling-haters-how-to-respond-to-negative-online-reviews/#24ccc7ca6a85>) reports how Walmart decided to become pro-active in responding to negative online reviews 'no more free shots'. The example shows where a job applicant, who was a veteran, applied but wasn't hired. Walmart responds by directing the applicant to their web page that explains their hiring program for veterans.
2. A lawyer receives two reviews on the same topic, one a compliment and another a complaint. The compliment is from an ideal client (happy to pay and a pleasure to serve). The other client is not happy to pay and is annoyed with a 'high fee' quoted. The real issue

is how different people value your expertise. The edifying response is a very professional way of explaining your commitment to quality.

Responding to the complaint:

1 ★ on Avvo, Jul 08, 2013 Kimberly T Lee Law Offices - Indian Wells, CA

Anonymous

We had our initial trust done in Northern California and just needed to make some updates. We offered her the disc to make the changes and she said the laws had changed and she needed to re-do it completely for more than \$4000. Our old lawyer back home made all the changes and updates in accordance with all new laws for less than \$500.

Business response

"While I am sorry that these prospective clients did not like the price we quoted, there is a reason for it. We are not a word-processing firm. If we were only to modify the original trust, we would be responsible and liable under our insurance for the entire document, including the original attorney's work. As a result, our office policy is to re-draft the trust according to our own standards and to stand behind it. We sincerely wish this couple the best and are happy that they found a solution that was more in their price range."

Responding to the compliment:

5 ★ on Avvo, Jul 20, 2011 Kimberly T Lee Law Offices - Indian Wells, CA

Jerry and Suzanne

We met with Kimberly several years ago when she offered to review our Trust, which had been written the year before by a Trust specialist. In no time at all she found glaring errors in the other person's work, errors that would have put the validity of the Trust in question. Kimberly rewrote the Trust properly for us with a level of detail that gave us total peace of mind. She has also been a valuable resource in reviewing other Trust related matters, in answering questions, in referring us to other professionals when needed.

Because of her upbeat, fun-loving personality we actually enjoy going to see her. It's hard to believe that we actually look forward to seeing an attorney. « **less**

Business response

"Thank you for the kind comments! It's very much appreciated. Kimberly"

Tom Caffrey writes about technology used by lawyers. Tom is a frequent speaker at estate planning and elder law conferences. His company, Premier Software, supports estate, planning, elder care and litigation firms from coast to coast for practice management and for web based online review and reputation management solutions.



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