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How do you best use Yelp for your business? If you run a local business, Yelp should be an essential cornerstone of your online presence. Yelp was launched back in 2004 and continues to be the go-to resource for millions of visitors looking for information about local businesses. Is your business doing all it can to attract new customers from the ever-growing audience on Yelp?

Whether you’ve been active on Yelp in the past or you’re starting a new business, we hope that the advice we impart will help you increase your business using Yelp.

Why Focus on Yelp?

Are you thinking, “shouldn’t I focus on the latest social media platforms like Snapchat, Buzzfeed, or Vine? Isn’t Yelp old news?”

With over 135 million unique Yelp visitors a month, 86,000 active Yelp business accounts, 67 million Yelp reviews and 35% of new Yelp reviews from mobile devices; it’s fair to say that Yelp is still the dominant force when it comes to social review sites.

Restaurateurs know the value of increasing their star rating on Yelp, but other businesses make up 85% of the listings, showing that customers turn to the site to make decisions for all sorts of local businesses.

How to Get Started on Yelp

Before starting to, well, get you started; here are a few basics.

If your business is relatively new, the first thing you’ll want to do is see if it has already been listed on Yelp. Chances are it has.
Go ahead and search for your business’s name. Once you find it, click the link that says, “Work here? Unlock this Business Page.”

Don’t go too long without claiming ownership of your business on Yelp. Otherwise, it could be subject to others adding inaccurate information, resulting in an unflattering presentation of your business!

For more info on creating your business account on Yelp, be sure to visit the Yelp for Business Owners section of the site.

Now, let’s take your Yelp presence to the next level:

#1: Immerse Yourself in Yelp – Read the Profiles of Your Competitors

Before you start fiddling with your own Yelp profiles, we highly recommend you first get a lay of the land. Search Yelp for your direct local competitors and click through their profiles. Take a close look at those with 4+ star ratings and those with 3 and below.

Try to distinguish the differences between those who are thriving on Yelp and those who are not. Do their photos set them apart? Does their website link lead to an impressive site or one that turns traffic away?

Can you start to see patterns in the types of things mentioned in their reviews? Try to pin down what your local market values highly and what prompts them to leave a review.

Learn from all your “research” and leverage your competitive research to ensure your own success on Yelp.

#2: Start with the Essentials: Complete Your Business’s Yelp Profile

The first step to getting your Yelp presence on track is to ensure you’ve got the essentials nailed down. Having a fully featured profile that gives visitors all of the info they seek is a must!

When creating your business profile on Yelp, you must make certain that you fill in the following key elements of your Yelp profile:
1. **Name and Category:**
   You’d be surprised how many businesses leave a typo in their name and miscategorize their listing. Double check this. No, triple check this. It’s the most important part of your listing.

2. **Detailed Address and Phone Number:**
   Include your street address, along with important notes about landmarks or cross-streets. Recently changed address? Update your contact info right away.

3. **Include the Link to Your Website:**
   This is crucial for converting more visitors into customers. If a Yelper (one who uses Yelp) clicks over to your website and likes what they see, they’re much more likely to become your customer.

4. **Quality Photos:**
   Nothing hurts your Yelp profile more than a blank photo area. Populate this with quality photos...

5. **Opentable.com:**
   does not apply to you.

6. **Important Info:**
   Be sure to accurately fill out all the info here. Obviously the screen shot above is for a restaurant, but a lot of the information in this section can pertain to you: hours of operation, price range (if you desire to publish one), ancillary services offered, and areas covered, accepts credit cards, etc. This info can make or break a customer’s decision to choose your business over the competition.

7. **About Your Business:**
   Although this tab is somewhat hidden behind the Reviews section, it’s important that you fill this out thoroughly. This extra info could be the tipping point that convinces customers you’re what they’re looking for in a home inspector.
#3: Create a Strong Photo Gallery

Most businesses on Yelp only have a couple of poorly shot photos, usually uploaded by visitors. Some businesses don’t even have one photo posted. This is a huge opportunity for your business to stand out.

If you can, hire a professional photographer to shoot a handful of engaging photos that inform visitors about what they’re in for when they visit you. Show off your team, your equipment and potentially your own Postcards from the Field.

**Important tip:** Include a photo or two of the front of your business (even if it is your vehicle) so customers know what to expect when they see you. The customers will think they know you if they already recognize you.

#4: Recognize the Value of Your Customer Reviews

We all know that positive reviews on Yelp add a tremendous amount of social proof for your business, not to mention increase your all-important star-rating. However, customer reviews hold much more value than that.

**Positive reviews can be leveraged outside of Yelp.** You can grab some of the best quotes and feature them on your website, citing the reviewer’s first name. This reinforces the social proof when visitors take that extra step to check out your website.

Believe it or not, negative reviews present a valuable opportunity for you as well. Whether you agree with the critique or not, negative reviews bring up points of concern about your business that you may have overlooked. Use this constructive criticism to improve your customer’s experience.

#5: Respond to Reviews

It’s amazing that more people do not take advantage of this incredibly valuable tool Yelp has provided business owners. You, as the business owner, can publicly respond to any review placed on your business profile.

Instead of firing away at every bad review that comes your way, stop and consider a more strategic approach.
If you choose to respond to a comment, do it calmly and respectfully. The key here is to show that you care. Thank the reviewer for their feedback, and point out things they may not have been aware of, or explain how you plan to fix or improve whatever it is they were complaining about.

Don’t forget to respond to positive reviews as well! Thank them for their business and for their kind words. Use this as an opportunity to highlight the hard work you’re putting toward a great customer experience.

The bottom line is, your visibility as the owner within the Reviews section will do a lot to set you apart from your competition – mainly because nobody else is doing it!

Yelp provides advice and info for business owners regarding responding to reviews here.

#6: Track and Use Metrics in Your Yelp Dashboard

Now for the catapulting into the 21st century part and kick your Yelp presence up a notch. Business owners on Yelp gain access to detailed behind-the-scenes metrics about their business’s performance on Yelp. These metrics were given a much needed makeover in March 2012, so if you haven’t logged in recently, you should definitely take a look.

Here, you can gather key insights about your Yelp presence. You can track the amount of traffic your Yelp profile receives and also see how many times your business showed up in search results on Yelp.

Tracking “User Actions” gives you an even closer look at how visitors are engaging with your business on Yelp. Actions include things like clicks to your website, mobile check-ins, photos uploaded, etc.

You can then use the info gathered to inform your decisions on issues like “when is the best day of the week to run special promotions?” or “how important is having a mobile website for my visitors?”
You can find quite a bit of helpful resources on the official Yelp for Business Owners section as well as the Business Owner’s Blog, where you can stay on top of the latest tools as they become available.

You might consider advertising your business on Yelp. While you can certainly find great success on Yelp using the free techniques described above, purchasing advertising placements on Yelp helps bring a few interesting benefits, such as:

- Removal of competitors’ ads on your business page
- Enhanced photo slideshow
- Video on your profile

Another idea is to run a Yelp Deal, which allows you to offer coupons to your Yelp audience. Although Yelp keeps 30% of the discounted price, Yelp Deals make your listing more attractive to visitors, and could prove to have a solid return-on-investment, especially when you use your Yelp metrics to guide the timing of your Yelp Deals.