

**Tips from TripAdvisor on Managing Online Hotel Reviews** by Daniel Edward Craig, March 29, 2010

### **What's new at TripAdvisor?**

TripAdvisor now has 32 million unique monthly visitors, 15 million+ members, and more than 30 million reviews and opinions on over one million properties. We're operating in 17 countries and 12 languages. One of our newest initiatives is Business Listings, which allows hotel owners the option of including direct contact details – website, phone number, and email address – on their hotel page on all TripAdvisor domains for an annual fee based on the size of property. Our goal is to put hoteliers one keystroke away from converting potential guests into paying guests.

Hotel reviews are popping up everywhere online, and there appears to be a trend toward sites sharing reviews, like on Google Maps. Where else do TripAdvisor reviews appear?

We believe that travelers should be able to find other travelers' feedback anywhere they're researching their trips. That's why we've created our Partnerships group, and have given both hoteliers and other travel sites different ways to partner with us and post our reviews. We've currently got over 100 contracted content partners – including jetBlue, Walt Disney World, Westin Hotels and Resorts, Visit London, Hertz, and AOL Travel – and over 14,000 unique websites have added a self-service widget or badge.

As the world's largest travel community, TripAdvisor truly represents the wisdom of the crowds. The sheer volume of reviews we have for an individual property allows travelers to base their decisions on the opinions of many.

### **What factors affect a property's ranking in the popularity index?**

The primary factors are the quantity of reviews, how well those reviews rate the property, and how current the reviews are. If we've discovered that a property has engaged in fraudulent activity, the penalties may very well impact their ranking for a period of time. And since I've been asked several times, I also want to clarify that whether or not a property opts for a business listing does not impact their popularity ranking.

### **What steps do you recommend hotels take to increase positive reviews?**

First and foremost, take care of your guests and give them a good experience. We do encourage hoteliers to solicit reviews, as long as incentives are not used. We also recommend that hotels monitor their reviews, and take advantage of this free feedback. Hoteliers can sign up via our Owners' Center to take advantage of free tools like email reminders, mini-review widgets, downloadable flyers, and custom reminder cards. We also offer badges, new review alerts, management response capabilities, and the ability to monitor satisfaction trends and compare performance against competitors.

Hotels should address any problems that travelers have identified so they don't impact future guests' stays – and reviews. They should also think about managing their entire listing, not just the reviews. Make sure the listing is as complete as possible. Travelers love photos and, as of March 1st, owners can upload an unlimited number. They can upload videos, as well. Also, the detail tab on the hotel listing page is a great place to enhance their property description.

## **What is TripAdvisor’s policy on hotels offering incentives or rewards to guests like upgrades, discounts or amenities for writing a positive review?**

It is against our policy for properties to offer incentives for reviews; the promise of a discount or any other perk casts the unbiased nature of the review into question. This policy is clearly stated within both our Help Center and the Owners’ Center.

Whenever we find out about a property offering an incentive – and we encourage travelers to let us know – we get in touch with them. We determine if they are unaware of our policy, and made an honest mistake, or if there was an attempt to game the system. In the latter case, they are subject to a variety of penalties, and their property is no longer eligible for inclusion in our Travelers’ Choice awards and Top 10 lists. Also, reviews that are shown to have been submitted as part of the incentive program will be further verified and potentially removed.

## **What can a hotel do if it feels a review is fraudulent or fictitious?**

Hoteliers can either make use of the Review Dispute form in the Owners’ Center or they can report the review via the “Report Inappropriate” link at the bottom of each review. While the dispute process is ongoing, we certainly encourage them to post a management response.

Content integrity is something we take really seriously, and approach in several different ways. First of all, members are asked to check a box when they submit a review in order to certify that the review is their genuine opinion, and that they have no affiliation – business or personal – with the property. By checking the box, they are also confirming that they haven’t been offered an incentive or payment for their review.

## **What does TripAdvisor do if it suspects a hotel has posted a fictitious review?**

We have three primary methods to insure the legitimacy of reviews: submissions are systematically screened by proprietary site tools that are continually upgraded; our team of quality assurance specialists investigates any suspicious content; and our large and passionate community helps screen our reviews and reports anything suspicious. If we determine that a hotel has posted a fake review, that review is removed, the property’s other reviews are investigated, and the property incurs penalties that may impact their popularity ranking. In some cases, a red badge will be posted on their hotel page, alerting travelers that the property’s reviews are suspicious.

## **Do you recommend hotel managers respond to all reviews?**

We strongly encourage hoteliers to address negative reviews. We often hear from travelers that how a property responds to criticism has more influence on their booking decision than the criticism itself. A management response is the hotelier’s opportunity to apologize and to let both that traveler – and all potential guests who are reading the reviews – know how they have remedied any problems. It’s an indication that an owner is invested in improving their establishment, and that they take customer service seriously.

As for positive reviews, we definitely see properties that respond and thank travelers for feedback. I think it goes a long way to creating loyal brand ambassadors.

*The former general manager of Opus Hotels, Daniel Edward Craig is a hotel consultant and the author Murder at the Universe and two other hotel-based novels. Visit <http://www.danieledwardcraig.com>*

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