

Using Ratings & Review Sites to Market Your Bar or Restaurant

By Rieva Lesonsky



Any bar or restaurant owner can't help but be aware of the power online ratings and reviews have to generate traffic for your establishment. Ratings and review sites are important not only because consumers turn to them when seeking bars and restaurants, but also because search engines are increasingly relying on them. That means the more ratings and review sites you have a presence on, the

higher your restaurant or bar will pop up in search results.

To get started, make sure your bar or restaurant is listed on the major review sites and on local search sites that incorporate reviews, including:

- Bing Local
- CitySearch
- Google Maps
- Insider Pages
- Local.com
- Merchant Circle
- Yahoo! Local
- Yelp!

Also look for niche review sites for bars, restaurants, and your local area. If you own a brewpub, get listed on beer review sites such as BeerAdvocate. If your town gets a lot of tourism, get on travel websites, such as TripAdvisor, where tourists go to find places to eat.

Next, "claim" your listing. Big review sites usually put up basic information about local businesses, so you might find your bar or restaurant is already on the site with a few facts such as address and phone number. Once you claim your listing, you can add more features including:

- photos
- hours of operation
- maps and directions
- link to your website
- description of your bar or restaurant
- coupons or discount offers

There is generally no charge to add extra features, and the more information you provide, the better picture of your bar or restaurant you're providing to prospective customers.

Explore each site to understand its special features. For example, RatePoint aggregates reviews of your bar or restaurant, then "pushes" them to your website, major search engines and social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook. MerchantCircle allows you to design a blog and newsletter for your customers.

It's crucial to monitor and respond to reviews so that negative comments don't sit unanswered online. Read "How to Monitor and Respond to Reviews of Your Bar or Restaurant" for more details on how to do this.

Ratings and review sites offer free analytics and tracking tools you can use to monitor things such as how many people view your reviews and how users respond to special offers or announcements. Use these tools to monitor what's working and what isn't.

Once you are comfortable with ratings and review sites you'll want to integrate them into more of your marketing. You can use RSS feeds to aggregate your reviews onto your own website so more users are exposed to them. Also look into the advertising or premium options each site offers. Test them and use analytics tools to determine if you're getting a good ROI.

Your [SCORE](#) mentor can help you incorporate ratings and review sites into your overall bar or restaurant marketing plan.

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