



ONLINE REVIEWS

Issued January 2019
Last Reviewed January 2020

INTRODUCTION

This helpsheet has been issued by ICAEW's Technical Advisory Service to help ICAEW members engage effectively with online reviews about their practice. The helpsheet offers practical tips on how to respond and offers examples too.

Members may also wish to refer to the following related helpsheets and guidance:

- [Marketing](#)
- [Using social media](#)
- [The duty on firms to investigate complaints - guidance](#)

THE IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE REVIEWS

Potential clients increasingly read online reviews about a practice before appointing an accountant or tax advisor. More than 54% of UK adults read online reviews for goods and services (Competition & Markets Authority, 2015) and 91% of 18-34 year olds trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations (BrightLocal, 2018).

There are hundreds of review platforms online including [Trustpilot](#), [Google](#) and [Yelp](#). Many platforms allow reviews to be left online without a practice having signed up to receive them. Whilst they vary slightly in approach the gist is usually the same; members of the public can post reviews about products or services received and the recipient of the review can respond.

There is nothing to stop members from writing genuine reviews about goods or services they have received from other organisations. Members must not, however, be tempted to leave anonymous negative reviews about their competitors.

GETTING STARTED WITH ONLINE REVIEWS

Rather than trying to engage with every relevant review site available, it's best to focus on one or two of the bigger platforms; [Google](#) by far being the most popular review site (ReviewTrackers, 2018). Clients are more likely to leave reviews on sites you are engaging with and the more reviews you have, the higher you appear in search engines.

If you decide the time is right to start engaging with online reviews, a policy should be developed addressing how clients will be asked to provide a review, who will respond to them and the internal review process.

Where possible it is best for someone else at an appropriate level within the practice to review responses before they are posted. Where this is not possible, for example you are a sole practitioner without any staff, it's best to have a 'cooling-off period'. Draft a response, take a break to do something else and return to it later to reflect on its appropriateness before posting. It may also be possible to ask a trusted friend to review your draft responses but do take care not to breach confidentiality.

Unless you actively seek out reviews from your clients, those making the effort to post a review will typically be those dissatisfied with the service or those loyal and enthusiastic clients who consider the service exceptional.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES IN RESPONDING TO REVIEWS

Ensure you respond and respond promptly

Having online reviews about your practice is not enough. Practices need to engage with and respond to comments received. 89% of consumers read local businesses' responses to reviews and this figure grows to 96% for those aged 18-34 (BrightLocal, 2018). Responses should be provided to **all** reviews, not just negative ones.

Users expect reviews to be responded to within seven days (ReviewTrackers, 2018). Do however still take the time to follow your internal review process to ensure responses are appropriate.

If it's complex or difficult, take it offline

In responding to online reviews, practices must ensure that they comply with the fundamental principles contained within section 110 of the **ICAEW Code of Ethics**. It can be challenging to respond fully to an online review without breaching the fundamental principle of confidentiality.

It is not necessary to go into great detail in responses to online reviews. Users are looking to see that you take feedback seriously, understand a reviewer's concerns and have taken action to try and resolve the problem. A simple apology and setting out a route to a resolution in your response creates a positive impression.

Make it personal

Where a user has provided their name, make the response personal by using the name they have given in your reply. To avoid possible breaches of confidentiality, don't use an expanded name in your reply though, e.g. a response to a review left by 'Andrew J.' should not be addressed to 'Andrew Jones', even if you know that is the full name of the reviewer.

Quality and quantity

The average star rating is important to users of reviews - 57% of consumers won't use a business that has fewer than 4 stars, but only 11% want a perfect 5 stars (BrightLocal, 2018).

This shouldn't put practices off however; consumers require an average of 40 online reviews before believing a business's star rating is accurate (BrightLocal, 2018). The more reviews, the higher the search engine rankings so encourage your clients to provide a review.

Share feedback

Feedback is invaluable to a practice. Feedback received from reviews (whether positive or negative) should be shared with those who have provided the service, and, where appropriate, you may wish to make use of positive comments in your marketing materials.

RESPONDING TO POSITIVE REVIEWS

When responding to positive reviews:

- Thank the reviewer for their feedback.
- Pick up the positives and reinforce them. This can help emphasise key aspects of your service.
- Ask what you can do to make it even better – especially if you have received a positive review but didn't get the elusive 5 stars.

Examples

Review: *'XYZ are a very professional, efficient firm providing useful advice. They always respond promptly and their fees are fair. Rachel S.'*

Response: *'We are really pleased to hear how professional and efficient you found our service Rachel. Thank you for your comments.'*

Review: *'XYZ LLP really helped me to understand and submit my personal tax return. A great service and I will recommend them in the future! They charged me a reasonable amount for the work done and I was pleased with the service. Sergei.'*

Response: *'Thank you for your kind and positive review Sergei, we're delighted we were able to help. We take pride in ensuring our clients don't just submit their tax returns on time, but understand them too - it's pleasing to see this reflected in your comments.'*

RESPONDING TO NEGATIVE REVIEWS

It is important not to be afraid of negative reviews. Most practices will receive negative reviews from time to time and such reviews being displayed gives a more genuine impression of the practice. Reviews give you an opportunity to collect feedback from your clients and in some cases feedback that you may not receive in a face to face meeting.

When responding to negative reviews:

- Acknowledge the review and thank the reviewer for their comments. Do not leave a negative review unanswered.

- Say what you have done to improve the service since it was provided to the reviewer. If you have employed more staff, why not say this? If you have changed a process again it may be worth saying that.

Examples

Review: *'XYZ are absolutely useless accountants – they hinder rather than help, they are always late and the information they submit is inaccurate! Their fees are extortionate for the appalling service they provide. Ms Boothe.'*

Response: *'Thank you for your feedback Ms Boothe. Client satisfaction is very important to us and we take your comments seriously. So that we can investigate the matter further, would you please email us (info@xyzllp.com) with the specific details. Thank you.'*

Review: *'The service I received from XYZ LLP was adequate, they did the work mostly properly and they did get my accounts filed on time. However they responded slowly to questions and only after much chasing. Mr A. Chopra.'*

Response: *'Thank you for your comments Mr Chopra. Our customer service is really important to us and we're sorry to hear we didn't achieve the excellent customer service we aim for on this occasion. We have recently increased our staffing levels to try and address this issue. If you would like to discuss this further please do let us know (info@xyzllp.com).'*

RESPONDING TO FAKE OR MISPOSTED REVIEWS

Fake and misposted reviews do exist but are not common in the context of accountancy practices. When responding to such reviews:

- Don't just assume a review is fake straight away. Try to establish the legitimacy of the review in the first instance. Could it have been posted using a nickname for example?
- Don't ignore it. Users won't necessarily be able to tell the difference between fake reviews and negative reviews. It can also be difficult to get reviews removed.
- Where a third party provider is used, report fake or misposted reviews to the provider, but **don't** just report a review because it is negative.

Examples

Review: *'XYZ LLP are a bunch of liars. They stole my money and refused to provide me with a service. Scoundrels! Unknown User.'*

Response: *'Thank you for your comments. From the details provided we have been unable to identify you as a client. In order that we can investigate this further, please would you email us on info@xyzllp.com with further details including your name and a telephone number. Thank you.'*

Review: *'Don't waste your money on expensive accountants!! Save money now by signing up to our money saving service which guarantees your accounts to be completed for only £50 if you sign up today! ABC Ltd.'*

Response: *'XYZ LLP has over 20 years of experience as qualified Chartered Accountants and can assist with a wide range of accountancy and tax engagements. Appointing an ICAEW Chartered Accountant will ensure you get someone who is professionally regulated, adheres to a code of ethics and has professional indemnity insurance. We work closely with our clients to understand their individual requirements and come up with solutions tailored to their requirements and budget.'*

IF IN DOUBT SEEK ADVICE

ICAEW members, affiliates, ICAEW students and staff in eligible firms with **member firm access** can discuss their specific situation with the Ethics Advisory Service on +44 (0)1908 248 250 or via **webchat**.

REFERENCES

BrightLocal. (2024). *Local Consumer Review Survey 2024*.

Competition & Markets Authority. (2015). *Online reviews and endorsements - Report on the CMA's call for information*.

ReviewTrackers. (2022). *2022 ReviewTrackers Online Reviews Survey*.

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