

# 301 WAYS TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO BOOST YOUR MARKETING

CATHERINE PARKER



# Reviews and Opinions Overview

## **TIP 253**    **Respond to positive reviews**

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If your business is being spoken about on a review website, the most important thing to do is to engage with the conversation that's happening—whether it's positive or negative. This is especially important because the number of people reading your review is likely to be higher than you think for two main reasons:

1. Depending on the visibility of the review site's domain in search engines, people searching for your company name may see the review conversation in results and click through to the page, even if that was not their original intention.
2. Many review readers don't post but only read what's written, so the number of readers is usually higher than the number of posts in a review thread.

While it's important to handle negative reviews properly (for more on this, see Tip 254), you should also respond to good reviews as a way of showing the reviewer and future readers that you listen to your customers and acknowledge their feedback. When responding to a positive review, your intention should be to show appreciation for the good review rather than to solicit another sale or action from the reviewer, which could annoy the reviewer and undo the goodwill that has been created around your brand. Therefore, don't ask the person to buy your product and don't add the person to your mailing list. You also shouldn't offer them any kind of reward for the review, since this could be interpreted as a bribe either by the reviewer or by the people reading your response. Try to respond to a positive review as quickly as you can, which will improve your image as a proactive business. To stay up to date with new reviews so that you can respond quickly, make a habit of checking review sites regularly or subscribe to their content.

Although many review websites allow you to respond privately, it may be a better idea to respond publicly so that people reading the review can also see your response to the original poster.

## **TIP 254**    **Respond to negative reviews**

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Ignoring a negative review can make a bad situation worse, so you should always respond. When you do, keep the following best practices in mind:

- **Be polite:** Treat the reviewer with respect. Being rude is the fastest way to lose a current or potential customer and spread a negative perception about your brand and business.
- **Be humble:** If you genuinely are in the wrong, apologize and take responsibility for the situation.
- **Provide a solution quickly:** Respond as quickly as you can and always try to suggest a solution to the problem as soon as you can. It's very possible to turn a bad review around by being prompt, honest, and proactive. In doing this, you're giving yourself an opportunity to show real customer service—which may result in the reviewer's changing his or her opinion of your brand.
- **Don't become defensive:** Even if you think the reviewer is wrong or inaccurate, you will damage your brand's reputation even more by being defensive about the problem in a public arena. Even if you respond privately and are defensive, you risk angering your reviewer, who can then repost what you e-mailed. Rather, stay levelheaded by acknowledging the reviewer's feedback and calmly stating your point of view while staying objective. It's worth noting that readers are usually more likely to side with the reviewer than with the business that is involved.
- **Keep it simple:** Resist the urge to have a drawn-out public dialogue with the negative reviewer or with readers of that review. If someone says something negative about your brand, acknowledge it, but move on and talk about the solution as soon as you can.
- **Keep the review up:** Many businesses feel that the best strategy for dealing with a bad review is to get it taken down from the review websites. Most review sites won't do this and, even if they can, this is detrimental to your brand as you could come across as a company that doesn't promote open discussion or value its customers' opinion.
- **Learn from it:** If you were in the wrong, use review criticism constructively as a way to improve your business in the future.



## **TIP 255** Understand Yelp

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Founded in 2004 as an “online urban city guide that helps people find cool places to eat, shop, drink, relax and play,”<sup>1</sup> Yelp ([www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com)) is an online review site that contains more than nine million local reviews.<sup>2</sup> Although originally started in San Francisco, Yelp has grown in size and now has a presence in all major cities, selected towns, and other locations in the United States, as well as in major cities within the UK, Canada, and Ireland.

Businesses with a physical presence can list their details on the Yelp site for their city—for example a restaurant, clothing store, movie theater, or dry cleaner in Los Angeles. Once the business’s details have been added to the site, Yelp users can write reviews on the service and give a rating of between one and five stars. Due to its large user base and geographic reach, Yelp is a powerful channel of word of mouth within the community, which means that it can have a powerful effect on your brand’s reputation. A positive review, for example, can result in a significant increase in customers. Yelp also attracts external traffic from search engines, and so listing your website as part of your Yelp business profile can be another channel by which to drive traffic to your site. On the other hand, negative reviews can have an equally strong impact on your business, and so it’s important to have a strategy to deal with bad reviews too (for more on how to respond to negative reviews, see Tip 254).

Reviews on Yelp are based on a strong social networking platform. Via internal e-mail, members can connect with each other to share photos, compare reviews, blog posts, and more. This social networking aspect is fully integrated into reviews on the site: when you read a review, you can click on the reviewer’s profile to read all the reviews he or she has created and to add the reviewer as a friend on a site. This helps other users place the reviews in context and judge the reviewer’s opinions and perspectives against previous entries.

## **TIP 256** Claim your profile

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The first step in establishing your business's presence on Yelp is to claim your profile. Previously, business owners had to sign up as regular Yelp users to do this, but Yelp now allows you to create a specialized business owner's account. To sign up, go to <https://biz.yelp.com> and click the "Get A Business Owner Account" button at the right of the page. Since any Yelp user can add your business to Yelp without being part of the company, you should start by searching the directory to see whether your business is already listed. If your business isn't listed, click the "having trouble finding your business" link at the bottom of the dropdown box from the search field. On the next page you'll enter details about your business, including your business's name, physical address, Web address, and hours. Also select a category for your business, which will affect how visible you are in search results for users looking for a business in your industry, as well as how visible you are when they browse by category.

If your business is listed, you'll be asked to enter your details, including your name, e-mail address, and password. Next, you'll need to confirm that you're the business owner. Yelp verifies that you're the owner of the business through phone verification. When you add a new listing and add your associated phone number, the system will call that number and provide you with a code that you'll then enter into the site as confirmation. Once the verification process is complete, take the time to fill out your profile comprehensively beyond the basic details like your business hours and contact details. By adding things like a history of your business, photos of your location, and information about special offers you're currently running, you create a better hook for people viewing your page that encourages them to leave a review or visit your website.

Once you've claimed your business, you'll receive e-mail alerts when a new review is written about your business, and you'll be able to respond directly to reviewers via e-mail. As a business owner you'll also be able to see statistics on who has viewed your page.

**TIP 257****Solicit reviews**

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Once you've listed your business, the next step is to start getting reviews—preferably positive ones. Higher-profile and better-established businesses will naturally attract more Yelp reviews than small or new companies. If yours is one of the latter, there are two main ways that you can get others to write reviews of your business:

- **Ask your customers:** Even if you have happy customers, they may not think to write a review about their experience with your business on Yelp. Let them know you're on the site by linking to your Yelp profile from other online channels such as your blog, website, e-mail signature, and company newsletter. You can also publicize your Yelp profile in your offline materials, on your restaurant menu or in leaflets that outline your services and prices. If you have enough positive reviews, you are eligible to receive a "People love us on Yelp" sticker that you can display on your business's premises.

- **Ask your network:** You can also ask people with whom you have an existing relationship, such as your friends, suppliers, partners, or vendors, to leave reviews. Rather than e-mailing them all at once, e-mail different subsets of people around once a month and ask them to leave reviews. Although this process is more time-consuming, it's worth it to ensure that your profile has a more natural buildup of reviews added to it. When you ask someone you know to leave a review for your business on Yelp, ask the person to leave his or her honest opinion of your business rather than a "fake" review that's intended to blatantly drum up your sales. Besides looking made up to readers of your business profile, these kinds of reviews will be deleted if Yelp thinks they're not genuine. How the site decides whether a review is a fake depends on a variety of factors, such as how many other reviews the reviewer has written. For this reason it's preferable to ask people you know who are already active on Yelp to write reviews for you.

**TIP 258****Use your account information**

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Once you've set up your business account and are starting to get reviews, there are several other ways you can use your profile to connect with the Yelp community:

- **Update with offers and announcements:** On the “offers and announcements” page in your Yelp business account, you can upload details about news, events, and special offers that your business is currently running. In addition to improving your brand image, keeping your profile current increases the chances that people will return to view it, as well as to share it with others they know. The other advantage of uploading offers and announcements is that these are indexed in Yelp search results, so that you get added exposure for people who are searching for related content. Note that you shouldn't use announcements to respond to reviews or to request more reviews.

- **View stats:** In the summary tab of your Yelp business owner account, you'll see statistics showing you how many people are viewing your Yelp page. This can be an effective way of measuring how successful your marketing efforts are in marketing your Yelp page. For example, you can track how many people view your page immediately after you post your Yelp profile on your Facebook page. You can also do this to track the effectiveness of announcements, discount promotions, or special offers that you display on your profile.

- **Install your badge:** Installing a Yelp badge on your website or blog encourages your existing readers, or customers buying products off your site, to visit your Yelp page and leave a review. To be able to install the badge, you first need to have a certain number of reviews written about your business. Once you do, click the “Get badges for your website” link on the summary tab of your business owner's account. From here you'll be given a snippet of custom code that can copy and paste into the code of the page where you want the badge to appear.

**TIP 259****Get involved with the community**

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As with any other social networking site, you'll get the most use out of Yelp by being an active participant. Being involved in the site as a business owner makes both parties active in the review process, which makes for a more objective and balanced discussion around a particular business. Says Yelp, "The minute a business owner humanizes and puts a face on a business, it changes the conversation."<sup>1</sup> There are several ways you can be active in the Yelp community that help you become a value-added member of the site. Start by writing reviews of other businesses in your area. For example, you could review your favorite coffee shop even if you own a pet store. This is also beneficial for you as a business owner, since that business may return the favor and write a review for your company.

Yelp allows you as a business owner to recommend up to five businesses. While you can recommend businesses you know and like, it may be a strategic decision to recommend businesses that are in the same industry and location but aren't competitors so that they can refer their customers to you. For example, if you're a wedding planning service, you may want to recommend a wedding cake maker in your city, who can then recommend you back as a complementary service. In this scenario, each set of customers will benefit from the recommendations each business makes.

Take advantage of Yelp's social networking functionality by adding friends and building and maintaining your network of friends. Yelp helps you add people you're already connected with in e-mail programs like Gmail and Yahoo!, but you can also add reviewers as friends by clicking on the "Add as a friend" button on a user's profile page. It's also worthwhile to connect with other business owners on the site whose services complement yours (like the wedding planning/wedding cake example just mentioned). Once you're connected with them, you can form a mutually beneficial relationship by writing reviews and referring customers to each other.



## **TIP 260** Respond publicly and privately

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When someone leaves a review on your Yelp profile, it's important to engage in the conversation and respond to the review (for responding to positive and negative reviews, see Tips 253 and 254). Yelp lets you respond both publicly, in the form of a comment underneath the review, or privately, where you can e-mail the reviewer once after he or she has written a review. Public responses are good for showing both the reviewer and any other person reading the review that you're a fan of open discussion, that you listen to your customers, and that you're prepared to find a solution in the case of a negative review. Public responses are also useful if you want to update information in the review or correct it, such as when someone mentions a menu item or drink that you no longer offer or when you can't resolve a problem through a private message on Yelp. To leave a public response, log in to your business account and then click the "Reviews" tab. From there you'll be able to add your comment, which will appear under that particular review on your business's profile page. As mentioned in Tip 254, always be polite, objective, and honest in your response rather than being defensive.

In addition to leaving a public response, Yelp lets you contact the reviewer privately via e-mail. As part of the site's efforts to combat spam, you will be able to send only one e-mail to the reviewer at a time until the reviewer writes back to you. In the same way, the reviewer is allowed to send only one e-mail back to you until you respond back, and so forth. If you respond privately, stick to the same rules that you do when you're responding publicly: be polite, don't try to solicit more from that customer, and don't be defensive. By following these rules, you increase the chance of the customer's responding to you in a continuing dialogue and of improving the customer's perception of your brand.

A good route to take may be to respond publicly and then follow up privately with the reviewer to reinforce that you've taken the feedback seriously. This may be even more important in the case of a negative review.

# Epinions

## **TIP 261** Understand Epinions

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Owned by Shopping.com, which was in turn acquired by eBay in 2005, Epinions is a consumer review site where users can review products or services in more than thirty categories such as books, music, electronics, and travel. Epinions calls itself a source of “unbiased advice,” which means that if your product or service gets a favorable write-up on the site, others will see this recommendation as unbiased and are therefore more likely to trust it, which will in turn have more of an impact on whether someone else buys that product or service.

One of the key ways in which Epinions keeps its reviews credible is via its “Web of Trust,” which is where users can indicate the reviewers they trust and those that they don’t. Together with rating a review, your personal Web of Trust will determine in which order you see opinions on the site (for more about the Web of Trust, see Tip 264). The social networking aspect of Epinions also lets you connect with potential customers by adding them to your “Trust” list.

Besides writing reviews, users can rate reviews as being helpful or not and can leave comments on other people’s reviews. Epinions provides a good way of monitoring your reputation online through its alert system, where you’re e-mailed whenever a review is written about your product or service. Reviews on the site are supplemented with educational resources in the form of buying guides, how-to guides, and product definitions. Once you’ve decided on a product, the site also provides you with pricing comparisons and merchant availability for you to compare prices.

Epinions can also be used as a way to establish authority in your industry by writing related reviews yourself as a business owner. For example, if you’re an electronics retailer, you could provide reviews on electronic equipment that would help to build your reputation as someone who’s knowledgeable about electronics. If your reviews are particularly helpful, you can become a top reviewer, advisor, or category lead, which means more exposure for you on your site and more referral traffic to your website via your Epinions profile page.

## **TIP 262**   **Set up your profile**

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If you're writing reviews on Epinions as a way to establish yourself as a source of knowledge in your industry, the first step is to set up your user profile. As with most other reviews and social media sites, your profile page on Epinions contains personal information about you, including your biographical information and your contact details. This is an important part of building your credibility on your site, since your profile page will list your past reviews, how many people have visited your page, and how popular you are as an author within a particular subject category.

To create a profile, sign up by clicking the "Join Epinions" link at the top right of the home page at [www.epinions.com](http://www.epinions.com). You'll be asked for a user name, a password, and an e-mail address to associate with your account. After you've confirmed your e-mail address, click the "Create your own profile" link to enter your personal information. In the "Account Options" column on the next page, select "Edit Public Profile" and enter your name, e-mail address, geographic location, biography, and a link back to your blog or website. Also include a contact e-mail address for people to get in touch with you directly if they prefer.

Your user profile shows your reviewer status—for example, general member, top reviewer, advisor, or category lead. Attaining a higher level of membership (above a general member) is a good way of increasing the number of people who will add you to their Web of Trust, which can lead to more visibility for your profile and more direct leads. Also, the more popular your review is and your status as a reviewer is, the more likely it is that your reviews will rank in search engines, which means more external traffic to your review and profile page from outside of the Epinions site. For more on these different member levels, see Tip 265.

Once you've created your profile, you can start writing reviews (see Tip 263) or adding people to your Web of Trust (for more on this, see Tip 264). As with any social networking site, the more active you are on the site, the more exposure you'll get for your profile page.

**TIP 263****Write and rate reviews**

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Writing useful reviews builds your credibility as an Epinions user, which means that more users will add you to their Web of Trust (see Tip 264). Also, any review you write is linked back to your profile page via your user name, so the more reviews you write, the more exposure your profile page will get and the more traffic you'll drive to your website from your profile. To begin writing a review, click the "write a review" button on any product or topic page (if you want to write a review on a product that's not already listed on the site, you'll need to ask the category lead for that category to add it).

When you write a review, always aim to be objective and rational and don't review your own product. Rather, write about products that are related to your industry but don't compete directly with yours. For example, if you sell guided hiking tours, you could provide reviews on hiking accessories or gear under the "Sports & Outdoors" section. In this way you can give unbiased advice while improving your exposure within your industry on the site. Try also to stick to reviews in one category, which will help to increase your exposure to an audience that's more targeted to your business.

Below the review text, you can rate the product with from one to five stars. You can also rate other people's reviews as Very Helpful (VH), Helpful (H), Somewhat Helpful (SH), Not Helpful (NH), or Off Topic (OT). You can also choose to Show (S) or Don't Show (DS) Express Opinions, which are shortened versions of reviews. Rating other reviews helps to improve the number of opinions you're shown that you find useful.

As well as writing reviews, you can write opinions about more general topics where you provide advice to others, such as what kind of golf shoes to buy or how to choose a bartending guide. To write these opinions, click on topics for the buying guides in the "Advice" section of a specific category; for example, book-buying guides in the "Book" category.

## **TIP 264** Add people to your Web of Trust

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Epinions' "Web of Trust" system helps to tailor your experience with the site so that you're shown more reviews that you find useful, since you trust the opinions of the people who write them. Alongside any review you read, or in someone's profile page, you can click the "Trust" link, which adds that reviewer to your Trust list. In the same way, if you find a review unhelpful or offensive in any way, you can click the "Block" link for that reviewer. If you change your mind, you can return to the reviewer's profile and click the link that says, "Remove [user] from your Block/Trust list." The more users you trust or block, and the more you rate reviews (from a sliding scale of "Very Helpful" to "Off Topic"), the better the site is able to learn what kinds of reviews you prefer. Once you've been doing this for a while, you should see more reviews from people you trust and fewer from people you've blocked. The list of people in your Web of Trust is visible in your profile, and you can choose whether to make this visible to others or not. Unlike your Trust list, your Block list always remains private.

The Web of Trust concept works similarly to the people you trust in real life—you may trust them because you've known them for a while and you know their past reputation, or you know people who recommend them, or they have interests similar to yours. When deciding whether to trust someone on Epinions, the logic is the same: spend some time reading the user's profile and some of his or her past reviews and see who else is in the person's Web of Trust. See whether this user has preferences similar to yours or has written a lot of reviews in your industry.

Just as building up a Web of Trust enhances your own user experience, becoming a member that other people trust can also be a valuable way of improving your brand's reputation on the site. The more people who add you to the network, the more your profile will be viewed and the more people will get to know you as an authority in a particular area. In addition, if you receive enough trust from other Epinions users, you can become a top reviewer or a category lead (for more about this, see Tip 265).

**TIP 265****Become an elevated member**

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Besides being a general member, you can become a top reviewer, advisor, or category lead if your reviews and ratings are frequent and useful enough. Being an upper-level member means your reviews are given more exposure on the site, and you'll develop a more solid reputation as a reputable source of knowledge in your particular area. Your member status is also shown alongside your profile name in reviews that you write and on your profile page, which further helps to build your credibility. The three kinds of elevated memberships on Epinions are:

- **Top reviewer:** If your reviews are of a consistently high quality and enough people add you to their Web of Trust, you can be chosen to be a top reviewer in a particular category. As a top reviewer, your reviews are given increased visibility to other members, which means you'll be seen as a highly credible member on the site. You'll also be more likely to earn more Income Share, which is a bonus that Epinions distributes to writers who contribute the most useful reviews. The amount of Income Share you can earn is determined by how often your reviews are used by Epinions users to make buying decisions—whether it's a positive decision to buy a product or a negative one not to. Top reviewers are evaluated around once a month, so you'll need to continue writing a minimum number of quality reviews in a particular category each month to keep your top reviewer status.

- **Advisor:** Epinions advisors are members who help other users find the best content on the site by rating the reviews they read. As an advisor, your ratings are weighted more heavily than other members in that category, and you have a greater influence over the reviews that new members can see. Epinions advisors are chosen by the community every eight weeks on a peer comparison basis and are selected based on the frequency and quality of their ratings and review comments. It is possible to be a top reviewer as well as an advisor if both your ratings of other reviews and your own written reviews are of a consistently high quality.

- **Category lead:** This is the most powerful type of member that oversees a particular category on the site. As a category lead, your reviews are weighted more than anyone else's and are therefore the most visible on the site within your particular category. Category leads can choose advisors and top reviewers, and they can add new products to the site for others to review.

## **TIP 266**   **Monitor your brand**

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Epinions is a good channel through which to stay aware of what's being said about your product and your brand, as well as of what people are saying about your direct competitors and their products. An efficient way to stay up to date with this information is to subscribe to reviews for a particular product—whether it's yours or your competitor's. The most important thing for you as a business to do on a review website is to engage in the conversation that's happening around your brand. Subscribing to reviews means you can follow up quickly with the reviewer, which is particularly useful if your product receives a negative review as you can contain the damage to your brand's reputation by attempting to rectify the situation as quickly as possible. If, on the other hand, you receive a positive review, subscribing to alerts means you can quickly contact the member concerned and thank him or her for it. Be sure that in the case of a positive review you don't ask the reviewer for anything more, such as pushing another one of your products or asking the person to write more reviews. As with all review sites, you should take the time to listen to what's being said about your product and use the criticism constructively to improve your product offering in the future.

When you subscribe to a review on Epinions, you'll be alerted whenever a new review is added, which means you won't have to keep checking that review page for updates. To subscribe to a review, click the "Subscribe to new reviews" link alongside the product description on the review page you're interested in. You can do this for as many products as you like. To view all the alerts you are receiving, click the "E-mail Alerts" link under the "Settings" section of the left navigation menu on your profile page.

Besides subscribing to reviews for your own products, you can use Epinions as a way to stay aware of your competitors and what's being said about them. To do this, subscribe to a competitor's review page in the same way that you would do for your own products.

## RateltAll

### **TIP 267** Understand RateltAll

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RateltAll is a consumer review website that pitches itself as the “fun and social way to find and share reviews about everything.” Unlike other review sites, RateltAll doesn’t limit itself to a particular category of product or service, so users can rate things like games, art, travel, music, movies, drinks, and sports teams in addition to traditional services like restaurants, bars and clubs, and products. In addition to writing reviews on the site or e-mailing them in, users can create and submit lists and can isolate opinions via filters on particular demographic groups. Because of this wide range of reviews and review formats, the site allows people to give not only opinions about a product or service but also their opinions on other angles of the product, its general genre, and the product as compared to other products. As a business owner, RateltAll can provide a good way of finding out the general consumer perception of your brand, particularly in terms of how they see it in your industry as related to your competitors.

RateltAll places a strong emphasis on social networking, which allows you to find other users on the site with similar interests and tastes. If you like the opinions a particular reviewer has, you can add them to your Trusted Network, which means you see more of his or her reviews. The site makes it easy for you as a business owner to connect with potential customers or other people or businesses in your industry. You can also promote your site, product, or service on the site and have other people rate it.

RateltAll has an “open door” policy with its content, which means any Web publisher can use RateltAll content on its site. The site gives revenue-sharing opportunities to business owners through a partnership with Google AdSense, where you can earn money by allowing ads to run alongside your content. Finally, RateltAll uses RSS so that you can subscribe to topics or reviewers you’re interested in because they relate to your brand or your industry.



**TIP 268****Fill out your profile**

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To create a RateItAll profile, sign up for a profile at [www.rateitall.com](http://www.rateitall.com) by clicking the “Register” link at the top right of the page. Enter a user name, password, and e-mail to associate with your account and then click the green “Sign me up” button. On the next page, the site will connect with existing contacts you have on sites like Gmail, Yahoo! Mail, or LinkedIn that are also RateItAll users. Next, add an image to your profile and click the “Finish!” button. Once this is done, you can enter other profile details such as your geographic location, personal details, and a biography.

The information that is shown on your page consists of activity on the site from you and your contacts. Your home page feed is divided into three sections:

- **“Me”** shows your own recent activity on the site, such as reviews you’ve written, ratings or comments you’ve made, or lists you’ve created.
- **“Everyone”** shows activity from everyone on the site.
- **“MyFeed”** is a personalized information stream showing news about keywords, categories, and friends you’re interested in. To change these settings, click the gear icon at the right of the feed section to bring up a window divided into four tabs: on the “Keywords” tab, select keywords related to topics you’re interested in, such as *cell phones*, *New York*, or *U.S. Open*. In the “Community” tab, choose which people’s activities you want to see—for example, only friends or friends of friends. Similarly, you can choose keywords that you don’t want to see information on by adding them to your block list. The “Saved Topics” tab lets you see content that you’ve subscribed to via the “Fave” buttons on pages around the site, while the “Story Types” tab lets you choose the type of information you’ll see within “MyFeed,” such as reviews and ratings but not quizzes.

In all three tabs, you can click the down arrow icon under the “right now” heading on the left to view only certain types of information published, such as only reviews. This is a temporary filter that can be changed at any time.

## **TIP 269**   **Get your business listed**

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RateItAll's "Promote" section lets you add your business, product, or service to the site's database so that people can review it. Encouraging reviews of your brand, product, or service is an effective way of increasing brand exposure, monitoring your brand's reputation, and engaging in conversation with prospective customers. To add your business to the RateItAll database, go to [www.rateitall.com/promote](http://www.rateitall.com/promote) and click the "Get started now!" button. You'll be asked to enter the name of your business or product to see whether there are other instances of your product that are already listed on the site under various categories. If there are, click on the brand or product you want to promote. To mark yourself as the product or service owner, click the yellow "claim this page for free" tab alongside the info tab at the top of the page. Once you've confirmed you're the owner via digital signature and the claim has been approved, you'll be able to update the page's information yourself and control what other viewers can see on the page.

If your business or product isn't already listed, click the "Continue" button at the right of the results page. You'll be asked to select the type of listing you want:

- **Local business or service:** Examples include bars, restaurants, mechanics, or laundromats. For this type of listing, you'll need to enter a physical address.
- **Website or blog:** This is applicable if your business operates online—for this listing, you'll need only your website or blog URL.
- **Other:** Use this option to promote anything that doesn't fit into the preceding categories, such as travel attractions and destinations, nonfiction books, authors, architecture, magazines, or fashion trends.

Once your business is added, you can subscribe to any updates on it by clicking the RSS icon at the top of the reviews column. From here you can start getting others to write reviews on your site (for more on how to do this, see Tip 270). Since RateItAll is fair and objective, you can't control how others review your product, but you can have an effective strategy for responding to positive or negative reviews (for more on this, see Tips 253 and 254).

**TIP 270**

## Encourage others to leave reviews

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Once you have your business, product, or service listed on RateltAll, you can start encouraging people to leave reviews. The best way to do this is to market your review page to your existing network. There are several ways you can do this:

- **Share the page:** When you're on the review page, use the "Share this page" section in the right column to e-mail it or add it to your Facebook account or Twitter feed or click "grab embed code" to place the widget within your own blog or website (for more on this, see Tip 273) so that people can add a review without leaving your site.

- **Blog about it:** Include a link to the RateltAll page from your blog or create a new blog post about a new product or service you're selling with a link to your RateltAll review page contained within the post.

- **Let people know they can e-mail:** RateltAll lets users write reviews without visiting the site by sending them as e-mails to [reviews@rateitall.com](mailto:reviews@rateitall.com). The e-mail should contain the product in the subject line, the star rating as the first line of the e-mail, and then the review below it, and pictures can be attached as an optional extra. Also, every item on RateltAll has a unique e-mail address that is linked to your page's URL in the format [reviews+\[unique id\]@rateitall.com](mailto:reviews+[unique id]@rateitall.com). You can find this e-mail address by clicking the "e-mail your review?" link at the top of the review page. Use this feature by including the e-mail address alongside products on your websites to encourage more user reviews. Once the e-mail has been sent, RateltAll automatically adds it to the related page on the site.

- **Connect with others:** By using RateltAll's social networking functionality, you can connect with other users on the site who will see your activity on the site in their "MyFeed" section. Therefore, the more active you are, the more exposure your profile and business listing will get among your contacts.

**TIP 271****Connect with other users**

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RateltAll has social networking functionality that lets you connect with other users on the site as a way of building relationships with potential customers and increasing your brand exposure. Broadly speaking, you can either connect with people on the site that you already know or add people as connections that you don't know personally but whose reviews you find interesting or useful or who write reviews on products related to your business offering.

As a business owner who writes reviews on the site, you can encourage people to follow you as a way of establishing your credibility as a source of knowledge within a particular category. Once you're connected with another RateltAll user, you can contact him or her directly from within the site.

There are several ways you can add connections to your RateltAll account:

**1. Search for people you know:** Click the yellow "Invite friends" button in the right column of your home page when you're logged in. RateltAll will connect with existing Web-based e-mail accounts you have such as Gmail, Yahoo! Mail, or LinkedIn.

**2. Add useful RateltAll users:** You can add someone as a connection by navigating to his or her profile page and clicking "follow me" under the profile information in the right column of the profile page. Once you're following someone, activities that he or she does on the site, such as favoriting a product or writing a review, will be published to the "MyFeed" section of your account's home page (as long as you've enabled friends' activities to show through there). You can also subscribe to that user via RSS or receive an e-mail whenever he or she posts a new review.

**3. Encourage people to follow you:** Adding a link to your RateltAll profile on external sites like your blog, Facebook, or MySpace page can be a good way of encouraging more people to follow your reviews and activity on the site.

**4. Take quizzes:** Quizzes are a way for the RateltAll site to see whom you're most compatible with in a particular area, which lets you connect with people in your industry or with those who have the same interests as you. To start, click the "Quizzes" menu item in the top navigation menu.

## **TIP 272** Create and share lists

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RateltAll lets you create lists about anything you are interested in. For example, if you're a landscape gardener, you can start a list containing your favorite plants or plants that work well in small gardens. If you're a bicycle shop, you can start a list of your favorite bike routes in a particular city. The real power of lists comes not from creating them but from getting other RateltAll users' input on the list you've made by rating or reviewing it. Doing this is a way of encouraging a discussion around a particular topic that relates to your brand, product, or industry.

To create a list on RateltAll, follow these guidelines:

- 1.** Log in to your RateltAll account and click the yellow "Create a list" button.
- 2.** Think of a name for your list, such as "top 10 bike routes in San Francisco."
- 3.** Click the green "continue" button.
- 4.** Select a category for it, such as "Movies," "Sporting Goods," or "Destinations" under the "Travel" sections.
- 5.** Describe your list, add a photo, and add keyword tags. Tags are an important way of ensuring that your list is visible to people searching for related content.
- 6.** Click the green "Continue" button.
- 7.** Begin adding items, filling in the description and a link if necessary and/or a photo.
- 8.** Once you've added your list, you can click the "Edit List" or "Edit Items" tab to change your list's details.
- 9.** Once your list has been published, people can suggest things to add to it, which you'll then see in your message center. You can either approve or reject the suggestion.

Once you've created your list, you can promote it by sharing it so that others can review and/or rate it. To share a list on sites like Facebook or Twitter, click the "Share this page" section on the right-hand side of the list page. You can also e-mail your list to RateltAll contacts or to other people you know who aren't on the site by pulling in contacts from Web-based e-mail accounts like Gmail or Yahoo! Mail. The useful part of this sharing functionality is that anyone can share the list—not just the creator—and can do it without needing to be logged in to the site.

**TIP 273**

## **Add the consumer review widget**

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The RateltAll consumer widget lets publishers of blogs or websites integrate RateltAll's ratings functionality into their own site about their own products or service. By including the widget in your site, you can encourage customers to interact with your brand and give their point of view about your offering—all while not requiring them to leave your site to do so. RateltAll's review widget can be placed anywhere you'd like customer feedback about something you're selling or talking about, such as on a blog post, a product page, or even the home page of your website.

The widget lets users do two things: either they can enter their own reviews and ratings of your product or service, or they can read ratings and reviews that others have written about the same thing. They can also search on keywords in existing reviews or click through to the related review page on RateltAll. To submit a review, users need to register as RateltAll users. If they're not already registered, they can do this from within the widget by adding a user name, e-mail address, and password and then entering the review. The widget also interfaces with Facebook so that users can connect with this review functionality from within their Facebook account.

To install the RateltAll widget on your site, first navigate to your review page on RateltAll. At the right of the page, in the "share this page" section, click the "grab embed code" link. This will take you to a page where you can customize the widget to your own preferences: choose among three sizes, eight different colors, or add custom branding such as your logo and a link to the review page on the RateltAll site. Once you've finished selecting your options, copy the code and paste it into the code on your blog or website where you want it to appear.

## Yahoo! Answers

### **TIP 274** Understand Yahoo! Answers

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Yahoo! Answers is a free, community-driven opinion site on which anyone can ask or answer a question on a variety of topics. Unlike a chat room, Yahoo!'s activity centers on a question and answer format rather than a free-form discussion. For a business looking to market itself, Yahoo! Answers is a useful site to engage on when the business centers on knowledge sharing, such as if you're a consultant. That being said, if you're a retailer selling a product, you can still find opportunities to provide knowledge about the specifics of a particular product type as an answer to a question being asked.

Although you need to be registered to ask or answer on Yahoo! Answers, anyone can view pages on the site, which also have excellent visibility on search engine results pages. To encourage a quality information exchange, Yahoo! Answers awards users points for answering questions, which allow you to escalate through "levels" that have accompanying privileges, such as being able to ask more questions on a given day. True to its social media nature, Yahoo! Answers lets the community decide which answer is best based on a voting system.

The primary advantage of being active on Yahoo! Answers is that you can build your reputation as a knowledge expert on a topic related to your line of business. As your credibility and visibility build, you can generate more traffic to your profile page, which contains a link to your website and therefore means more traffic to your site. Because of its niche nature, Yahoo! Answers may not result in large volumes of traffic to your site, but rather is better as a source of highly targeted traffic from people actively seeking out the product or service you're offering. Another advantage to your business on Yahoo! Answers is if your website is listed as a resource that supplements a particular answer. In these cases someone else is endorsing the information on your site, which will result in good brand exposure and another source of qualified traffic to your site.

## TIP 275 Set up your profile

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Your Yahoo! Answers profile page contains information about you, including a summary of your activity on the site, such as recent questions and answers, how many points you've earned, and who your contacts and fans are. Create your profile by logging in to <http://answers.yahoo.com> with your Yahoo! account (if you don't already have one, you'll be prompted to create one). Once you've logged in, click the "Edit My Preferences" drop-down link under the "My Activity" tab on the home page. Choose a nickname and profile picture that will appear alongside any of the questions or answers you submit to the site, and select your privacy preferences below that. In the "About Me" section, enter details about why you are qualified to answer questions in your particular category and include a link to your website to back up your credentials. Once you've confirmed your selections, click the blue "Preview" button and then "OK" to confirm.

As with any other social media site, the more you network with other users, the more benefit you'll gain. Once you add people as contacts, you'll see their questions and answers by clicking on the "My Network Activity" link under the "My Activity" tab. As opposed to contacts, fans are Yahoo! users who have added you to their own network of contacts so that they can follow your activity on the site. Having a lot of fans is an excellent way of building your credibility on the site and exposing your knowledge to as many people as possible.

There are two main ways to add Yahoo! Answers contacts:

- **Add them from their profile:** When you are browsing someone's profile page, click the "Add to my contacts" link. Or, if you're on a question page and you want to add either the questioner or the responder to your contacts, roll over the person's profile picture and click the "Add to my contacts" link from the pop-up window that appears.

- **Add your existing contacts:** On the "My Activity" tab, click the blue link on the page that says, "Invite your friends to join your network on Yahoo! Answers."



## **TIP 276** Ask and answer questions

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Once you've set up your Yahoo! profile, you're ready to start answering questions. Questions that are asked and answered on the site are organized into categories and subcategories that cover a broad range of subjects such as politics, sports, travel, dining out, business, beauty, and pets. To find categories, click the "Browse Categories" tab from the home page; clicking any category link on this page will take you to the category page containing links to its subcategories. Below the subcategory items on the page are questions within that category that are organized in three tabs:

- **"Open":** Each question is open for a period of four days, during which other members can answer it. If no one answers it, it expires and is deleted. The question creator has the option of extending this answer period by an extra four days before it expires.

- **"In Voting":** Once the question has been online for at least four hours and there are one or more responses, the person who asked the question can choose the best answer. If the question asker doesn't select a best answer within the four-hour period and there are two or more responses, the questioner can put the question up to the community to vote. The best answer is also put to a vote if the person who asks the question takes no action and the "open" period of the question expires. When this happens, the question will appear in the "In Voting" tab. The voting period is two days.

- **"Resolved":** Once the best answer has been chosen, the question is considered answered and can't be answered anymore, although you can still leave comments and rate the best answer. If this is the case, you'll see the answer in the "Resolved" tab.

To answer a question, start by browsing to the category or subcategory related to your business—for example, "Books and Authors" under "Arts & Humanities" if you're a bookstore owner. When you find a relevant question, click on it, and on the question page, click the blue "Answer Question" button. On the page that follows, type in your answer, provide relevant sources, and then click the "Preview" button. If you're happy with your answer, click the "Submit" button.

**TIP 277****Give quality answers**

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When answering questions on Yahoo! Answers, use the following guidelines to get the most value out of the answering process and exposure for your brand:

- **Try to answer first:** The first answer under a question is typically above the fold of the screen, which means it gets more exposure than those that fall below it. Many visitors don't realize that there is more than one answer under the first one, particularly if the question and answer take up most of the space above the fold.

- **Give a quality answer:** Take the time to research your answer and then explain it clearly and simply. Doing this gives you a better chance of having the question rated as the best answer, which means it will be shown first above all other answers. You also earn extra points for having your answer selected as the best response (for more on the points system, see Tip 279).

- **Include links to your site only if they're useful:** When you answer a question, you'll be given the option to include URLs of sources for your information. Include resources other than your own here, unless you have a page of resources on your site that are highly relevant to the question being asked. It's important to note that soliciting or advertising on the site goes against the Yahoo! Answers' community guidelines, and your answers will be flagged and removed if you do so. If you do provide your own link, always ask yourself whether the link you provide genuinely provides useful answers or simply advertises your product. For guidance, stick to including your link to your website or your own content once in every ten answers and provide the most specific link you can rather than your home page.

- **Sign your name:** To add credibility to your answer, leave your full name when you answer and make sure you have the option checked to link to your profile page. This allows people who liked your answer to click through and view your profile page, from where they can visit your website listed in the "About Me" section, or they can e-mail you or IM you directly.

## **TIP 278** Answer relevant questions

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To get the most use out of Yahoo! Answers as a way of improving your brand's reputation, concentrate your activity on the site within a category related to your business or industry. There are several ways to keep up to date with questions being asked in a particular category:

- **Search:** The search box is featured in the header of every page on the site, so start by searching on keywords related to your industry, such as *motorcycles* or *Yamaha* if you sell motorcycles. In the results, browse through open questions that you can answer.

- **Browse:** Yahoo! Answers lists categories and subcategories that you can browse through to find questions to answer, such as "Cars & Transportation" > "Motorcycles" or "Maintenance & Repairs."

- **Subscribe:** Unless your area of expertise is extremely specific, it can be time consuming to keep up with questions to answer in every category that's applicable to your industry. As a solution, you can subscribe via RSS for any category or subcategory on the site. So, as a motorcycle dealer, navigate to the "Motorcycles" subcategory in "Cars & Transportation" and scroll down to the right column, where you'll see an RSS icon and a link that says *RSS*. You can also create an RSS feed based on a particular keyword search. To do this, enter your keyword search and then click the "RSS" link in the left column on the results page.

- **Use search engines:** As well as searching for questions within Yahoo! Answers itself, you can enter your keywords into Yahoo!'s regular search engine and then click the "Answers" tab in the results page to see questions and answers that are featured from the Answers site. Questions featured in regular search results will get more traffic than other questions, so answering these is a good strategy if you have time to answer only a couple of questions a day or week.

## **TIP 279** Earn points

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Yahoo! incentivizes its users to provide genuine, quality answers through a points reward system: the more questions you answer, the more points you earn, while the more questions you ask, the more points are taken away. This is because you're seen as using up resources when you ask a question and contributing to the site when you answer them. You can also earn points for other activities on the site; for example, if your answer is selected as the best answer, you'll earn ten points, while if someone gives you a "thumbs up" on an answer you wrote, you'll earn one point.

As you earn more points, you'll be promoted to higher user levels on the site: to move from level 1 to level 2 you need at least 250 points; to move to level 3 you need 1,000 points; to move to level 4 you need 2,500 points; and so on. Each level has accompanying privileges that allow you to rate answers, comment on more answers, and ask more questions. For example, as a level 1 user, you can ask five questions and answer twenty per day, but you can't rate any answers and you get only a total of twenty votes for an answer per day. In contrast, a level 3 user can ask fifteen questions and answer sixty. The site's level structure means that the more you participate on the site, the more visibility you'll gain with other users.

Your Yahoo! Answers profile page shows you a tally of the points you've accumulated. This means that the more points you earn, the more credibility you'll be shown to have to people viewing your profile page (as well as on the pop-up window if you roll over the avatar on the answer page). Note that Yahoo! Answers frowns heavily on what it calls "point-gaming," which is where you deliberately try to increase your points on the site without adding any value through questions that are "advice-seeking" or answers that are "knowledge-worthy."

If by providing consistently good responses that are often chosen as the best answers you become known as being especially knowledgeable in a particular category, you have a chance of being selected as a "top contributor." When you're awarded this status, you'll have a "top contributor" badge that will show in your profile and as part of your avatar when you participate on your site.

## **TIP 280**   **Be active to be visible**

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Even if you don't have the time to answer large volumes of questions on Yahoo! Answers, it's better to spend shorter amounts of time on the site more regularly rather than to spend a longer time on it more sporadically. Besides establishing yourself as a genuine, value-added member, regular activity on the site encourages a more steady flow of traffic to your site from your profile page. Yahoo! Answers also encourages regular activity by rewarding you with points each time you log on (for more on the points system, see Tip 279). Two other main ways to be active on the site are:

**1. Add a badge:** Embedding the Yahoo! Answers badge on your blog or website provides your site visitors with an extra information resource in the form of questions and answers from the Yahoo! Answers site. You can customize the badge as much as you like so that it relates to your industry and to the subject on the page it's embedded on—for example, you can include only questions in a particular category or questions related to a particular keyword or only questions that you've answered. Change these options, as well as the badge's look and feel, by going to <http://builder.answers.yahoo.com>. Once you've selected your preferences, copy the code that is generated and paste it into the code of the page on which you want the badge to appear.

**2. Build up your contacts:** Your activity on the site, such as answering a question or rating an answer, is published to the news feeds of your Yahoo! Answers contacts, which means the more contacts you have, the more people will see your answers, ratings, and comments on the site.

As with all social media efforts, you should track the effect your activity on the site has on your site traffic. Based on these numbers, you may be able to identify the shortest amount of time that you can spend on the site to give you the maximum return. In other words, there may not be much of a difference in terms of your site traffic between your answering ten questions and answering twenty-five. However, since you earn points and move up levels the more questions you answer, it's harder to track improvement in the perception of your brand to other Yahoo! Answers users that could result.

## TIP 281 Don't spam

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Because Yahoo! Answers is a knowledge resource, it has a strict antispam policy that prohibits businesses from using the site as a way to solicit customers. At the same time, Yahoo! Answers realizes that businesses with specific knowledge may be well positioned to answer questions in their area of expertise, and they may have further resources on the topic that the user would find helpful. Because of this, it's acceptable to answer questions while being associated with your business. However, keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Provide information, not pushes for your product:** Always give proper information in an answer rather than using your answer as a thinly veiled way to push your product. For example, if you are a tax software company, answering a question about the difference in tax rates in certain states would be acceptable, while answering a question about the best tax software to use would not.
- **Keep your answers relevant:** Keep your answers relevant to the question being asked and don't stray off topic.
- **Don't provide your contact details or Web address in your answers:** If people want to find out more about you, they can click through to your profile page for your contact details listed there.
- **Don't ask and then answer your own question:** This is a common spamming technique; answer only genuine questions that others have asked.
- **Be careful when linking to your own content as a source:** A common form of spam is to use your own URL as a source in every answer, even if it's not genuinely appropriate or relevant to the question being asked. Always use sources that are genuinely useful to the answer and never use affiliate sites or sites that have no proper content as source links. Supply a link to a page on your own website only if it specifically relates to the question and is a proper knowledge resource (such as a white paper or research article).

By providing quality answers, people will perceive your brand as being a valuable resource and will be more inclined to click through to your profile page and contact you directly if they want more information. Also, the more useful your answers are, the more chance you have that they'll be selected as the "best answer," which gives you increased visibility on the site.