

THE ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT GUIDE

*For Property Management
Companies*



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OVERVIEW

Most property management companies (PMCs) are aware of the importance of feedback from residents. They understand that it's crucial to get the pulse of resident sentiment through surveys, feedback forms, and reviews.

However, the creation of online reviews has changed the nature of such feedback, turning it from a private conversation between a resident and the property location into a public declaration of sentiment.

If that sentiment is positive, reviews can help attract prospective renters and turn them into long-term residents. If sentiment is negative, however, reviews can quickly turn prospects away. The best way to get positive online reviews is to increase resident satisfaction, which is often easier said than done.

In the world of multi-family marketing, reviews are more important than ever. Reviews are the **number one factor** consumers consider when making a purchase decision. According to our **2022 Localized Marketing Benchmark Report (LMBR)**, PMCs rank in the middle for reputation management compared to other industries. We'll dive deeper into the data found in our 2022 LMBR later in this guide.



DOWNLOAD OUR **2022 LOCALIZED MARKETING BENCHMARK REPORT** FOR A MORE IN-DEPTH LOOK AT HOW LEADING PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMPANIES ARE CRUSHING THEIR LOCALIZED MARKETING EFFORTS. **Download the Report Today!**

While it's clear that an online reputation management strategy is a must, additional data has found that:

- The overall review volume for Class A, B, and C properties has grown **over four times** from 2015 to 2021.
- **80 percent** of potential residents consider reviews necessary to their property search.
- Localized content performs **12x better** than content that is not localized.

This data further underscores the fact that effective reputation management can be the difference between low resident retention and high vacancy, and a property's ability to attract new residents.

Additionally, we can assume that most people who look at multi-family properties online have looked at the reviews on sites like Google, Yelp, and Facebook.

Managing reviews across 100s or 1,000s of properties has become a significant challenge for PMCs. But, how do you scale the management of your locations' online reputation? That's where this guide comes in.

01

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

The Online Reputation Management Guide for Property Management Companies is a set of recommendations for multi-family marketers in the property management industry who want to take charge of their properties' reputations at the local level but may be challenged to find the resources or know-how to do so effectively.

Before diving deeper into this guide, let's look at the three different segments of PMCs that this guide can help.

- Multi-family marketers
- Marketers at senior living facilities
- Student housing marketers

While the tactics might vary slightly depending on your sub-industry, most of the tactics we will cover next can and should be implemented to create an online reputation management strategy for your PMC.

Many property brands receive various new reviews every week across multiple sites and property locations. At that kind of scale, it can be challenging to respond to every review with the right level of care and attention. You risk either not responding to some reviews or doing so in a repetitive, impersonal manner that doesn't help to build resident engagement.

There is a solution. Your multi-location PMC can develop an effective review response at scale in a personal, engaging manner, but not without a thoughtful reputation management strategy.

In this guide, we'll cover best practices for maintaining a solid online reputation by monitoring local reviews and responding at scale while also providing tips on crafting responses for various types of reviews and prioritizing your influx of reviews.



02

EVERYTHING PMCS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT REVIEW RESPONSE

If you're not already convinced that a comprehensive online reputation management strategy is a must for your PMC, consider this: **46 percent** of all searches on Google include local intent. What will potential renters see when your local properties come up in local search results? While claimed and updated local listings are a must, your online reputation is equally important.

The competition is intense, and for many properties, reviews are the differentiating factor between one location and another. Put yourself in a renter's shoes.

If they have to decide between two properties, and one has a slightly higher reputation, and you notice that the property is taking the time to respond to reviews while the other isn't, which would you choose?

If your PMC is not responding to reviews, it could cause your local properties to:

1. Come across as though you don't care about your residents. If a potential resident sees that a property they're interested in hasn't responded to positive and negative reviews, it could taint their first impression.

2. Allow the reviews that haven't received a response to influence a future renter without any mitigating input from the property management team.
3. Miss out on constructive, unsolicited resident feedback that has the potential to help each property's overall brand.

Review response motivates current and former residents to leave more reviews and often leads to more positive reviews. In one independent study, review volume increased by **12 percent** and ratings went up by an average of **0.12 stars** because the business started responding to reviews.

A strong review response rate creates a better perception of your local properties' reputation. It may even help improve your star ratings and review volume, which are competitive factors in local search.

Review Response Is an Everyday Activity

One of the first factors you should consider in your review response strategy is timeliness. The real-time nature of social media has heightened expectations about brand engagement. If your PMC's local properties don't respond to a review in a timely fashion, you will miss your chance to change that reviewer's perception.

To develop a timeline for responding to reviews, you'll first want to determine who will be responsible for responding to reviews? Will local teams manage review responses, or will there be any corporate oversight? Typically, local teams have more insight into what is happening at their individual property and may be better equipped to handle review responses.

One way to determine who will respond to reviews is to record the number of reviews each property receives and see the bandwidth corporate and local employees have. Remember, what matters most is ensuring that your teams can **regularly respond to reviews**.

While this may seem overwhelming, further in this guide, we'll cover several strategies for efficiently responding to reviews. Some local properties can respond to all reviews received each day with an effective process in place.

While responding to as many reviews as possible is critical, responses to negative reviews should always come first. We'll get more into this topic later, but let's first look at where to start with review responses.

Where Should You Start With Review Responses?

This question often comes up for PMCs launching a review response strategy for the first time. You may have accumulated several years of reviews on Google,

A STRONG REVIEW RESPONSE RATE CREATES A BETTER PERCEPTION OF YOUR PROPERTIES, AND MAY EVEN HELP IMPROVE YOUR STAR RATINGS AND REVIEW VOLUME, BOTH OF WHICH ARE COMPETITIVE FACTORS IN LOCAL SEARCH.



Yelp, Facebook, and other sites. Do you need to go back and respond to all of them?

The answer is probably not. Remember, residents expect timely responses, so if a review is months or even years old, the benefits of responding to that aged review will have lessened.

You must weigh the benefits of responding to dated reviews against the fact that other online searchers will see that the timestamp of your response is much later than the timestamp of the original review. Unless you acknowledge that you're responding to the review after an extended time has passed, the response may seem inauthentic.

With that being said, if resources allow, it's wise to respond to noteworthy reviews from the past, like a review that expresses concern about a service that has undergone substantial improvement.

For instance, as a property manager, if you see a review from two years ago that complains about a unit's interior design, but you remodeled that unit and others last year, the review may still be worth responding to. A response like this would be helpful to prevent other potential renters from getting the wrong impression about your decor:

"Hello [Reviewer Name]! Sorry we did not respond sooner, but we wanted to let you know that we've completely remodeled our units' interiors since you last lived here! If you're still in the area, we hope you come back and check out our modern kitchens and stylish flooring."

Aside from these selective responses, at the beginning of a review response strategy, it's a good idea to **respond to all reviews from the past 30 days since online users will perceive these responses as relatively timely**. You should respond to as many reviews as possible from the campaign launch date forward. Setting a goal for your local properties before launching a review response strategy will help keep you accountable for responding to reviews.

Should You Respond to All Reviews?

In a perfect world, local properties should respond to all reviews, both positive and negative. It's important to thank and encourage those leaving positive reviews with just as much care and attentiveness as you give addressing the negative feedback.

From a perception standpoint, if you only respond to negative reviews, you risk creating the impression that you only care about residents' feedback when it makes your property look bad or costs your business. Responding to all or most of your reviews shows that your property brand cares about everyone's input and wants to create great experiences for all occupants. However, there are some exceptions to this rule which we'll get into next.

How to Prioritize Review Responses

1. Timeliness matters more than completeness

If your local properties lack the resources to respond to all reviews, it's far better to react only to a subset — such as reviews of three stars or less — in a timely fashion than responding more slowly or not at all. This strategy is an acceptable approach to responding to reviews,



especially if you are just getting started and can build your system over time.

2. You can skip text-free reviews.

Reviews that include a rating but no text (these are prevalent on Google) don't always need a response. These ratings will still contribute to your average star rating on the site where they appear, but it can be challenging to come up with variations of "Thanks for the great rating!" that sound authentic and sincere.

Responding to dozens of four or five-star ratings with no text may offer little benefit. Similarly, a low rating with no text is hard to respond to constructively. You may choose to respond to ratings without text if you have the capacity, but skipping them is acceptable when you're looking for ways to prioritize reviews that need a response.

3. Take delicate conversations offline.

You should carefully handle reviews that contain inflammatory language. If someone offers a bad-mannered opinion, you should always respond professionally and offer to take the conversation offline.

On the other hand, any reviews that threaten legal action, contain abusive or racist language, attempt to create political controversy, or are otherwise beyond the norm should not **be responded to publicly**. You can reach out to the reviewer privately, or if a review violates the terms and conditions of the

site it's published on, your best course of action is to request its removal rather than responding publicly.

4. Ensure your PMC is meeting industry standards.

Data from our previously mentioned [2022 LMBR](#) analyzed how top performing multi-location brands, including PMCs performed in local search, social, and reputation.

Data from SOCI's 2022 LMBR revealed the following:

74% OF PMCS RESPOND TO GOOGLE REVIEWS COMPARED TO ONLY SLIGHTLY MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF PMCS WHO RESPONDED TO YELP OR FACEBOOK REVIEWS

ON AVERAGE, PMCS STUDIED TAKE 42 DAYS TO RESPOND TO A REVIEW ON GOOGLE AND 13.7 DAYS ON YELP.

THE PERCENTAGE OF POSITIVE REVIEWS FOR PMCS ON GOOGLE, YELP, AND FACEBOOK WAS 52.6 PERCENT.

While responding to as many reviews as possible is key, your PMC should at least be meeting or exceeding these averages found in the report.

Who Should Respond to Reviews?

As mentioned previously, determining who will respond to reviews can vary depending on the nature of your PMC. One of the following scenarios will likely make the most sense:

1. **A team at the corporate office** handles all reviews and communicates with local property managers as needed
2. **Local property managers or local team members** handle all reviews.
3. **Both local and corporate teams** handle reviews. This hybrid model can often prove effective as long as everyone understands who is responsible for what.

If your local managers can consistently devote time to review management, they can often provide the most direct, authentic, and personal responses to reviews. However, in many cases, property managers are pressed to find the time for such activities, and they may find it helpful for corporate to assist with the review response strategy.

By contrast, regional or corporate staff will have less familiarity with the daily happenings at a particular property location. Still, they may have an easier time maintaining a consistent, professional brand voice for all responses.

PMCs must consider what works best for their structure and decide which plan best fits their needs and priorities.



03

HOW TO RESPOND TO POSITIVE REVIEWS

Let's set the record straight before turning to best practices for responding to positive reviews. Many businesses, including those in the property management industry, feel that consumers only leave reviews when they have something to complain about, but that's not the case. These days, consumers are **more likely to share** good experiences than negative ones. So what should responses to a positive review look like?

When responding to positive reviews, consider the following:

1. Thank the reviewer for being a resident.
2. Use the reviewer's name in your response.
3. Personalize your response by mentioning the subject matter of the review.

To the right you'll find an example of a positive review left for one of Greystar's Austin, Texas properties.

As you can see from the example on the right-hand side, the property management team responded by using the reviewer's first name, staying positive, and letting them know they'd be happy to assist the reviewer further.

It's also worth mentioning that it is unnecessary to respond to every point mentioned in the review. Doing so might make your response seem artificial and inauthentic. Instead, the response should be personalized, natural, and to the point while throwing in some powerful keywords for the category.



Grant King

1 review

★★★★★ 2 months ago

I've had a great experience living at Residences at the Triangle thus far. The property staff has been very great about communicating and resolving maintenance issues in a timely manner. Upon move in, we had a hand full of issues that needed be taken care of and management really went above and beyond to ensure our issues were prioritized.



Like

Response from the owner 2 months ago

Hi Grant King, we are very happy to have provided you with such a positive experience! If you ever need anything else from us, please feel free to give us a call or stop by. Have an awesome day!

- The Triangle Team



04

HOW TO RESPOND TO NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Responding to negative reviews requires sensitivity, attention to detail, and a constructive attitude. Remember, people who write negative reviews are usually not out to get you or tarnish your reputation. Many who complain do so out of a sincere desire to highlight how your local property can improve the renter experience.

Be Calm and Professional

It's best to approach responding to negative reviews by assuming that the reviewer means well. Don't take negative reviews personally, and don't use your response as an opportunity to prove that the reviewer is wrong. Whatever you say will be available for the public to see, so you want to always respond politely and professionally, even in cases where a reviewer has not done the same.

Develop Policies for Common Situations

It may seem like satisfied residents are similar — they praise you, and you thank them. By contrast, negative reviewers can present a range of seemingly unique challenges, but these challenges usually fall into specific patterns. As a multi-family marketer, you'll want to

develop a standard policy for each. Your review response policy can be a continuation of other company policies you likely already have in place, such as policies for customer service, the handling of complaints, and how to maintain a consistent brand voice when interacting with your target audience on social media.

Below, we'll look at some common negative review situations and include insight into how a local property should adequately respond. Remember, the list of problems will differ by PMC, and policies may differ significantly.

1. The resident received poor customer service; the property management team

For complaints about the leasing office staff, where a resident was generally dissatisfied with the service received, it's often best to issue a general apology without rehashing the fine details. Although you might want to respond by defending your staff, remember, the resident is likely **expressing what the experience felt like from their point of view**. You don't want to risk the appearance of defensiveness in front of other potential residents who may read your response.

Here's an example:

"Hello [Reviewer Name]! We're so glad that you took the time to share your experience with us. We always aim for the absolute best in resident service, and we're sorry you didn't receive that. We can promise that you

won't see the same issues repeated if you choose to live at [property name] again. Have a great day."

It's important to remember that residents who take you up on your offer to return may be on the lookout for specific changes in service and may even ask whether your team internally discussed and addressed their negative review. Your PMC must regularly maintain a high level of resident engagement and service.

2. The resident was unhappy with the quality of their unit or complex

This type of review could range from criticism of a specific unit to the quality of the complex's amenities. What all these experiences have in common is the feeling on the resident's part that they didn't get total value from what they expected or paid for. Again, such assessments are subjective, and it's best to take consumer feedback at face value.

Here's an example of a potential response:

"Dear [Reviewer Name], first of all, thank you for choosing to live with us. We're sorry that [the specific issue or service] didn't meet your expectations. We take feedback like yours very seriously and will do our best to improve. We hope you'll give us another try!"

Again, don't say you take feedback seriously unless you do. You'll want to develop a means of keeping track of complaints about specific amenities or services so that you can take meaningful action when other

residents make the same criticisms. For instance, have you received multiple complaints about deposit refund disputes? If so, this is something your property management team should efficiently resolve.

3. The resident is dissatisfied with circumstances outside your control

Sometimes, reviewers complain about things that your business can't easily change. For instance, a reviewer may complain that one of your properties takes too long to address specific work orders or maintenance requests. While you might be able to address and reply to maintenance requests in a more timely manner, other factors may prevent you from fixing them.

In this case, you can respond with sympathy and offer the resident an honest explanation of the holdup.

"Hello [Reviewer Name]! Thanks so much for choosing [property name]. We value your residency. We're sorry your maintenance request took so long to address. Our maintenance staff is facing supply chain issues, so it's been difficult to solve your request. We're working with our current and new vendors to see if we can expedite the process. Please reach out to us at [office phone number] or stop by the leasing office."

As you can see, the general idea is to take the reviewer's side, sympathize with the complaint, and offer your current action plan.

05

VARYING YOUR RESPONSES

If you've taken the time to develop a nuanced response strategy, you don't want to risk it all by responding repetitively in a way residents will notice. For instance, every time you get a positive review, you say, "Hello [Reviewer Name]! Thanks for the positive feedback," those who read through your property's reviews will likely notice that you've repeatedly posted the same response. It'll look as though it's copied and pasted without much thought, even if you typed each response separately and genuinely appreciated the review.

To avoid that generic impression, make sure the language used in your responses varies. Using different diction doesn't equate to your team having to put extra time and thought into your review responses. Instead, you can alter your responses slightly, ensuring some differentiation. Rather than saying, "Thanks for the positive feedback," you can say, "We appreciate the kind words," when responding to two positive reviews left in a row. This doesn't mean that you can never use the same responses — just make sure they're not back to back.

06

HOW TO WORK WITH REVIEW RESPONSE TEMPLATES

The need to respond to numerous reviews without being repetitive is where templates come in. Review response templates offer a variety of benefits when used correctly. For instance, if your PMC uses templated responses, you can ensure that your messaging will always be brand-appropriate, no matter who is doing the work. Templates also empower you to collaborate with relevant team members to determine the optimal way to respond to everyday situations. They can significantly speed up the process of responding to multiple reviews.

If you use templated responses, it's essential not to forget about the human aspect of responding to reviews. For instance, you can develop suggested responses for everyday situations, but make sure that whoever is responding to the review is free to customize and personalize those responses depending on the content of the review.

If you're starting from scratch, it's best to keep track of common themes in your reviews for several days or even a few weeks before creating templated responses. This way, you'll have a better idea of what the content in your reviews looks like and how templated responses should be composed so that they work well in similar situations.



07

USE INCENTIVES WITH CAUTION

When responding to negative reviews, there are a few times when it makes sense to offer a discount or incentive to placate a resident who had a negative experience. After posting a negative review, appeasing a resident can put you in a legally gray area. Note that in the U.S., the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) **overtly prohibits** “undisclosed paid endorsements,” including online reviews so check with your PMC’s legal department first.

You should also be on the lookout for residents who may abuse the system and leave a negative review with the hopes of receiving something for free. To stop this behavior from becoming more pervasive, any communication about offers or incentives should be taken offline and not occur publicly.

For instance, you could include a link to an online form or a leasing office phone number where the reviewer can contact your local property and provide more details about their experience. Once the conversation moves offline, you can give an offer or incentive if warranted and legally allowed.

08

FAKE AND INFLAMMATORY REVIEWS

While you should almost always accept a resident’s experience or situation at face value, there are exceptions to this rule. Sometimes, people write fake reviews about properties online, and in some cases, a review violates other rules of the review platform. When this happens, your PMC should treat how you respond to these reviews differently if you choose to respond to them.

Most review platforms have methods of filtering out reviews that show obvious signs of being fake, such as when a user only posts very negative reviews or when the same user reviews multiple properties. It’s worth noting that automated filters do not catch all fake reviews.

Fake Reviews, Spam, and Inflammatory Content in Your Own Listings

You’ll want to be on the lookout for reviews of your properties that are obviously fake or otherwise violate a site’s rules. For instance, a competitor might post fake negative reviews or even someone who is not actually a resident who, for whatever reason, wants to harm your property. Fake reviews have the potential to contain hate speech, profanity, advertising, and other types of spam or might be irrelevant to your PMC.

Most sites will allow you to report reviews that violate their guidelines. For instance, Google lets you flag reviews that violate its **policies** on users’ comments.

These policies include:

- Don’t spam or post fake reviews intended to boost or lower ratings.
- Don’t post or link to content that is sexually explicit or contains profanity.
- Don’t post or link to abusive or hateful content that threatens or harasses others.
- Don’t post or link to any file that contains viruses, corrupted files, “Trojan Horses,” or any other contaminating or destructive features that may damage someone else’s computer.
- Don’t post any material that violates the copyrights or other intellectual property rights of others.
- Don’t impersonate any person or falsely state or otherwise misrepresent your affiliation with a person or entity.
- Don’t violate any other applicable law or regulation.
- Don’t use comments as a forum for advertisement.

There are a few ways to report reviews to Google. First, you can click a flag icon next to the intended review, fill out a brief form, and submit your report. It can help to have multiple employees repeat the same action since Google tends to pay more attention when a review is flagged multiple times.

IF YOUR **BRAND USES TEMPLATED RESPONSES**, YOU CAN BE SURE **THAT NO MATTER WHO IS DOING THE WORK, YOUR MESSAGING WILL ALWAYS BE BRAND-APPROPRIATE.**



You can also reach out to Google support through the link provided in the Google Business Profile Manager dashboard, request help from the Google Business forum, or send a tweet to the Google team on Twitter. Hopefully, your PMC won't come across many fake or inflammatory reviews, but it's good to know how to handle the situation if it does arise.

09

START IMPROVING RESIDENT RETENTION AND LOYALTY

While we've just gone through everything it takes to maintain a solid online reputation, why is it important? As a PMC, one of your top goals is likely to build connections with residents and give them a better renter experience. Reputation management is one of your PMC's primary ways to build resident engagement and improve retention. The key to resident engagement and loyalty is to make renters feel special.

With reputation management, your PMC can make the residents feel special by:

- Responding to reviews thoughtfully, showing the resident that their feedback is important
- Implementing changes at your local property based on feedback from reviews
- Providing high-quality customer service and answering any questions left in reviews
- Building trust through a positive online reputation that transfers into a positive resident journey
- Acknowledging when a resident had a negative experience and putting in the work to ensure they're satisfied and have a better resident journey

As you can see, there are various ways reputation management and resident retention go hand in hand. As your local properties begin to focus on their reputation management strategy, you'll notice a positive impact on resident satisfaction, loyalty, and retention.



10

THE SOCI REVIEWS MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

Now that you understand what it takes to create a competitive online reputation management strategy, it's time to get started. SOCi offers a range of services to help PMCs manage their online reputation across 100s or even 1,000s of locations.

Through [SOCi's streamlined reputation management software](#), users can view every action taken on reviews and monitor every activity on social media. Your local, regional, and corporate teams will always know which reviews and social engagements you've addressed and which ones still require attention to ensure the prompt responses consumers expect. If you need additional information on improving your online reputation management efforts along with other aspects of localized marketing strategy, check out our [Localized Playbook for Property Management Companies.](#)

Stay On Brand

Implementing review response workflows for your PMC ensures brand-appropriate

and prompt responses, and SOCi can help your team do so. Local teams can receive notifications for new reviews, draft responses, get corporate response approval, and choose from pre-crafted answers with dynamic text capabilities to automatically personalize customized reactions to each situation — all in one tool!

Attract New Residents

With [SOCi's streamlined reputation management software](#) you can increase resident satisfaction and attract new renters. By empowering your local property managers with a tool to efficiently create personalized responses, you improve relations with every resident through positive engagement. This positive engagement significantly increases your properties' search visibility with every review and response. This visibility means more satisfied residents for you and more potential residents seeing your brand when they search!

If your corporate or local property teams don't have the bandwidth to respond to every review just yet, consider using [SOCi Assist](#). SOCi Assist is SOCi's professional team of social media marketers and reputation managers that are dedicated to your localized marketing and online success.

Never Miss an Opportunity to Elevate Your Reputation

Save time and money by aggregating all your reviews across every property into one centralized platform — accessible by corporate and local teams. Plus, give local marketing teams the power to respond to reviews and your corporate team the ability to maintain oversight by creating approval workflows.

With the ability to upload brand-approved, pre-crafted responses, reply to numerous reviews simultaneously, or generate responses based on machine learning, your local locations are empowered to be more personal, save precious time, and improve search visibility.

What're you waiting for?

It's time to crush the competition with a next-level [online reputation management](#) strategy, and SOCi can help! [Request a demo](#) today for more insight into how SOCi can help your PMC dominate its reputation management efforts, and beyond!



DISCOVER WHAT SOCI CAN DO FOR YOU.

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