

**guest** XM

by **Black Box** Intelligence

# Why Restaurants Should Not Ignore Neutral Reviews

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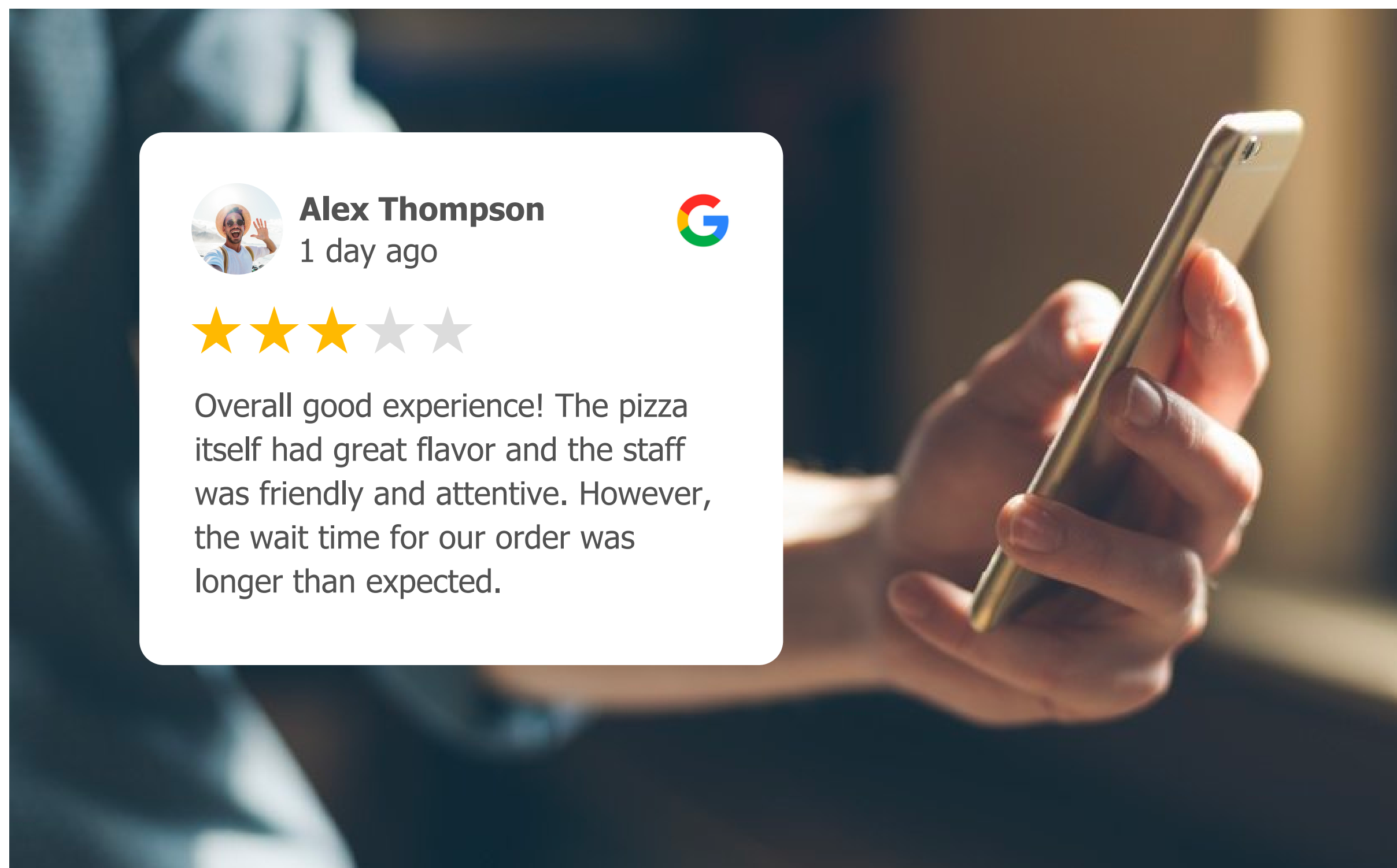
Most brands have come to understand the importance of managing their online reputations. This involves collecting customer feedback, dissecting it to find any opportunities for improvement, engaging with those who have taken the time to leave a review (i.e., replying to reviews in a timely manner, preferably within 48 hours), and using the information provided by interacting with customers to make the changes necessary to either encourage loyalty or prevent abandonment.

The problem is, however, restaurant brands tend to focus only on the extremes. In other words, their entire strategy involves bringing in more positive reviews and quickly resolving negative ones. This could be due to a lack of knowledge and/or a lack of resources or bandwidth.

Of course, engaging with positive and negative reviews plays a vital role in establishing trust with customers and improving a brand's overall net promoter score (NPS), a measure used to gauge customer loyalty, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for a company. Most review platforms have customers rate restaurants on a scale of one to five. In order to convert this into the NPS scale, multiply by two: A one-star rating is a two on the NPS scale, a two-star is a four, etc.

But by ignoring neutral feedback, businesses are potentially missing out on a goldmine of opportunities. Neutral reviews generally contain both negative and positive feedback, meaning brands can extract a great deal of useful information and spot trends that may otherwise be overlooked.

Impartial customers, also known as “passives,” may be on the fence and can be persuaded in either direction: neglect their remarks and potentially turn them into detractors, or implement proactive measures to address their feedback to turn them into promoters.

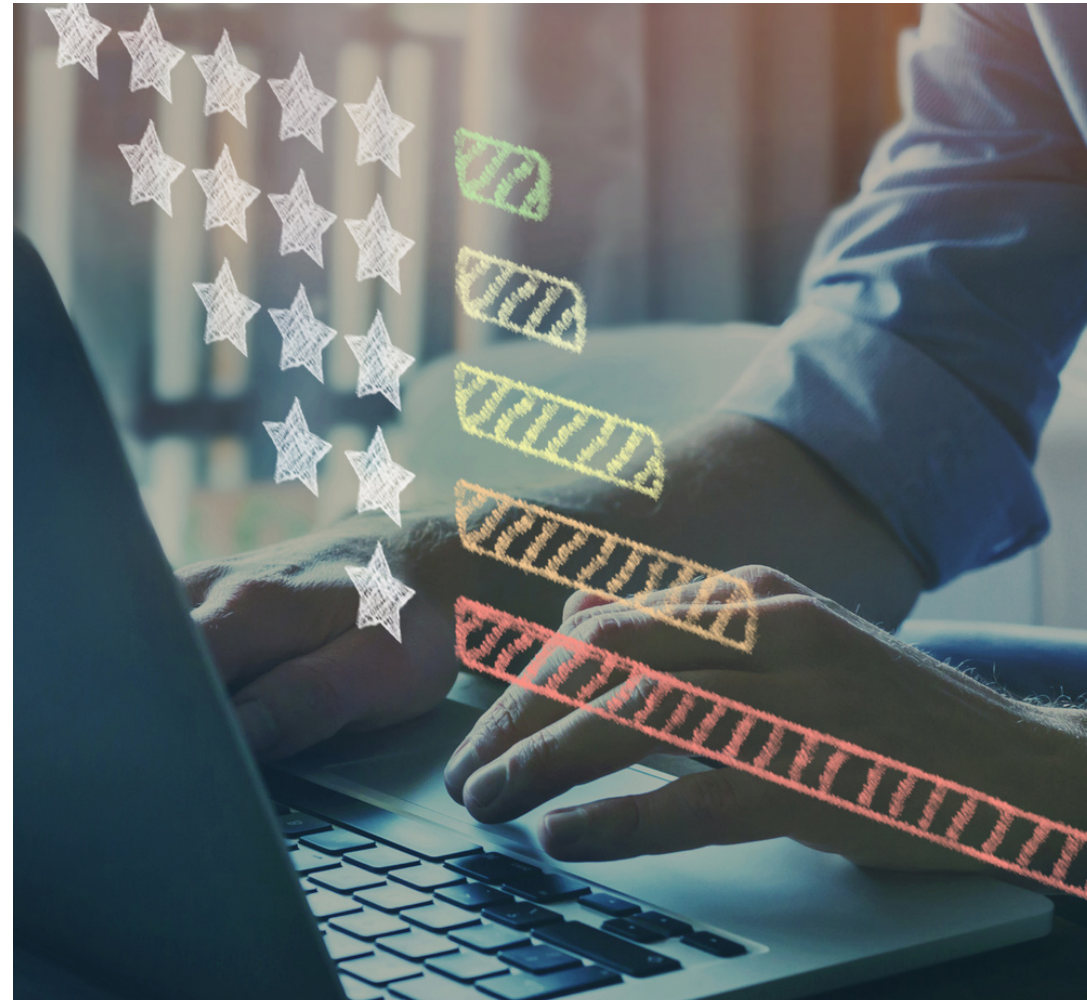


## The Nitty-Gritty of Neutral Reviews

In general, neutral reviews often offer a balanced perspective, pointing out both positive aspects and areas that need attention. However, from time to time, these reviews may offer no elaboration about a customer's experience, or they may not contain any comments at all.

Nonetheless, addressing all of these different forms can help restaurants enhance their overall customer experience and make necessary adjustments to their service, menu, ambiance, and more.

Let's take a closer look at the four variations of neutral reviews. Remember, these categorizations are not exhaustive, and individual reviews can vary in their nuances.



### Variations of Neutral Reviews

#### Balanced

This type of review merges a positive and a negative comment into one, requiring brands to address both in their responses. That means they have to strike the perfect balance between accepting the positive, apologizing for the negative, and providing solutions:



- "The atmosphere was cozy and inviting, but the food didn't quite meet my expectations."
- "The menu was diverse, but the portion sizes were a bit small for the price."
- "The food was good, but not great. The presentation was lacking, and I expected more flavor in my dish."

#### Positive Neutral

These reviews may have a three- or four-star rating and contain comments such as:

- "Great atmosphere."
- "Food was delicious."
- "Server was attentive and knowledgeable."

#### Negative Neutral

Similarly, some three- or four-star reviews contain only negative comments:

- "Service was slow."
- "Food was cold."
- "Music was too loud."

#### True Neutral

These reviews are non-specific, difficult to action, and tend to be short in nature:

- "It was alright."
- "OK."
- "Fine overall."

**No Comment Reviews:** These reviews only reflect the star rating, containing no further elaboration.

## Responding to Neutral Reviews Is Non-Negotiable

It's crucial for brands to let customers know they value the time they spend leaving reviews, whether it's positive, neutral, or negative. Responding to and acknowledging their opinions is one of the best methods to foster trust and long-lasting connections with them. According to research done by [Google](#), businesses that respond to reviews are seen as 1.7 times more trustworthy than those that don't.

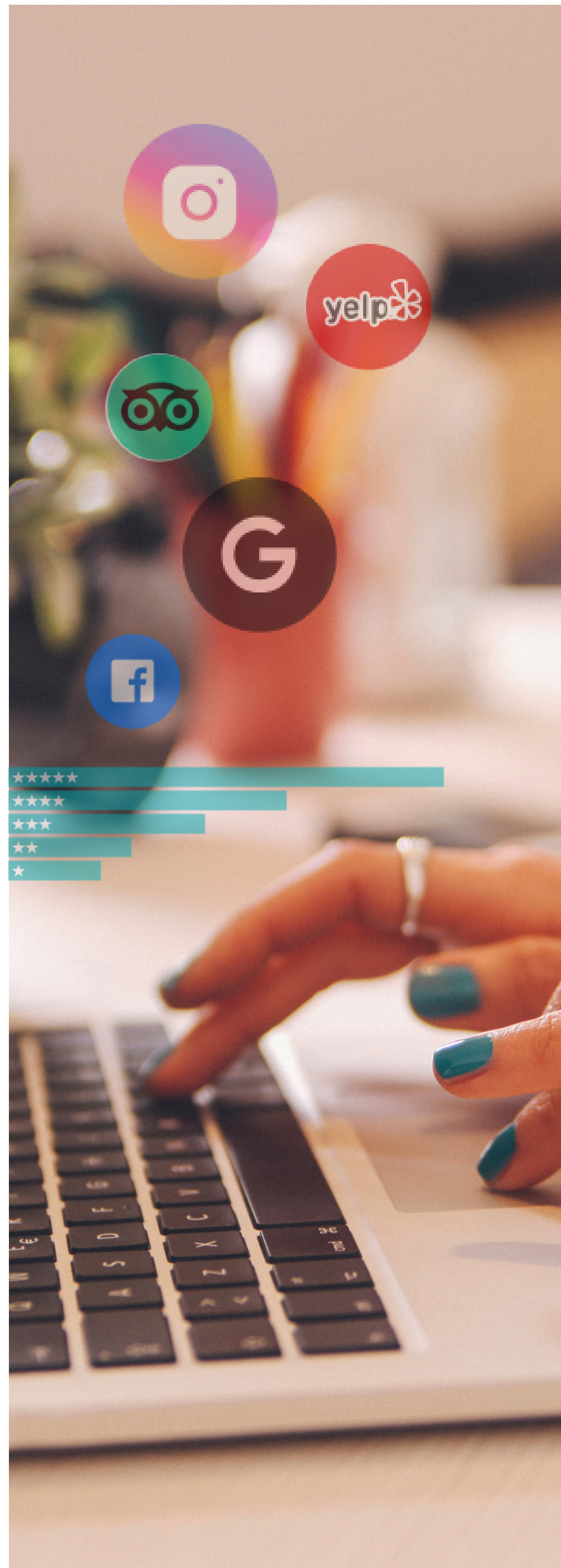
In terms of review platforms, looking at a sample of over 1.4 million reviews across Google, Yelp, Facebook, and TripAdvisor, we concluded that Google is one of the most critical review channels. This means not only monitoring reviews but also engaging with customers on the platform. Responding to reviews can improve SEO ratings. As per [Google](#), "high-quality, positive reviews from your customers can improve your business visibility and increase the likelihood that a shopper will visit your location."

However, that does not mean brands should prioritize Google over other review platforms. Effective online reputation management involves an omnichannel approach, meeting customers where they are at any given time. That is why it is important for businesses to ensure that they are active across the board.

As mentioned, potential customers tend to look up reviews before making a decision on where to dine. That means not only reading past customer feedback but also reading the responses from brands. Are they acknowledging their customers? Do they have clear solutions? Are their responses generic or personalized? These all influence a potential customer's final decision.

Where brands may get away with responding to five-star reviews with automated messages, these responses don't necessarily work when it comes to neutral reviews. So a lot of care and consideration need to go into how a business will engage with passive customers. More often than not, these responses need to be more personalized, building trust while simultaneously obtaining more information about the customer's experience.

To emphasize, research by [McKinsey](#) showed that 76% of customers believe personalized messages are crucial in enhancing their consideration of a brand, and 78% believe such communication made them more willing to repurchase.



Here are some examples of how to respond to the different types of neutral reviews:



## Balanced Response:

Dear [Reviewer's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about your experience with us. We truly value your feedback as it helps us enhance our services.

We're glad to hear that you found [mention something positive from the review, if applicable], and we also appreciate your insights on areas where we can improve.

Your concerns about [mention the specific concern raised in the review] have been duly noted. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you. We're actively working on [briefly mention plans to address the concern or improve the mentioned aspect]. Your feedback will certainly aid us in making the necessary adjustments.

We hope that you'll consider giving us another opportunity to serve you in the future. Your satisfaction is important to us, and we're committed to ensuring a better experience next time.

If you have any further suggestions or comments, please feel free to reach out to us directly at [contact information].

Thank you again for your review and your support.

[Signature]



## No Comment Response:

Dear [Reviewer's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to share your review with us. We're committed to providing the best possible experience for our customers and hope you would consider reaching out to us to discuss any concerns you may have about your visit.

Your satisfaction is important to us, and your feedback will certainly aid us in making the necessary adjustments.

Please feel free to reach out to us directly at [contact information].

Thank you again for your review.

[Signature]



## True Neutral Response:

Dear [Reviewer's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback with us. We want to ensure that we provide only the best possible service to our valued customers.

We would truly appreciate it if you'd consider elaborating on your experience at [restaurant name] so that we can work toward enhancing our services.

We hope that you'll consider giving us another opportunity to serve you in the future as your satisfaction is important to us.

Thank you again for your feedback, and we look forward to hearing from you.

[Signature]



## Positive Neutral Response:

Dear [Reviewer's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about your experience with us. We truly value your feedback as it helps us enhance our services.

We're glad to hear that you found [mention something positive from the review] enjoyable.

Please feel free to reach out to us directly at [contact information] with any concerns. We hope that you'll consider giving us another opportunity to serve you in the future as your satisfaction is important to us.

[Signature]





## Negative Neutral Response:

Dear [Reviewer's Name],

Your concerns about [mention the specific concern raised in the review] have been duly noted. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you. We're actively working on [briefly mention plans to address the concern or improve the mentioned aspect].

We hope that you'll consider giving us another opportunity to serve you in the future. Your satisfaction is important to us, and we're committed to ensuring a better experience next time.

If you have any further suggestions or comments, please feel free to reach out to us directly at [contact information]. Your feedback will certainly aid us in making the necessary adjustments.

Thank you again for your review.

[Signature]

**Please note:** Unlike the above examples, it is vital not to use the exact same language for all responses. These responses should be well thought out and, depending on the type of neutral review, should showcase acknowledgment of the customer's time and feedback, empathy for their experience, any positive points, a solution to their concern/s, an apology if required, a commitment to improvement, and contact information. Furthermore, brands should always respond in a clear, professional, and polite tone and avoid being defensive or dismissive of the customer's feedback.

## A Feedback Renaissance

A [3,800-year-old clay tablet](#) contains the first-ever-recorded negative review from a man named Nanni to a businessman named Ea-nāšir. Nanni complained to Ea-nāšir that the wrong grade of copper ore had been delivered to him and about misdirection and delay of a separate shipment.

Given the chance, people will share their opinions. It's human nature to want to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a service or product that costs money, time, or both.

Today, looking up online reviews of businesses has become second nature for most. The fact that information is now more accessible than ever, owing to advancements in technology, gives people the ability to make informed decisions in terms of where to spend their valuable time and hard-earned money.

Potential customers value the opinions of their peers, relying on word-of-mouth to paint a clearer picture of what they can expect while dining at a specific restaurant. According to a 2023 survey study by [BentoBox](#), 86% of respondents said they search for a restaurant online before making a decision. In a November 2021 [survey](#) conducted in the US, 85% of respondents stated that the overall average star rating of a business is one of the most important considerations when judging a local business based on reviews. 76% said the business having a higher-than-average star rating than other businesses is one of the most important aspects.

Furthermore, people appreciate having the freedom to share feedback on their own experiences. They want to be heard, and the sheer number of online channels available now offers a convenient and direct avenue for them to connect with a business and voice their opinions, contributing to a pool of information that helps other potential customers make more educated choices.



## The Need for New Technology

All in all, collecting and assimilating online customer reviews to unveil strengths and weaknesses and responding to feedback to build trust, gain more insights, and nurture stronger relationships with all reviewers and potential customers plays a vital role in becoming best-in-class in customer experience.

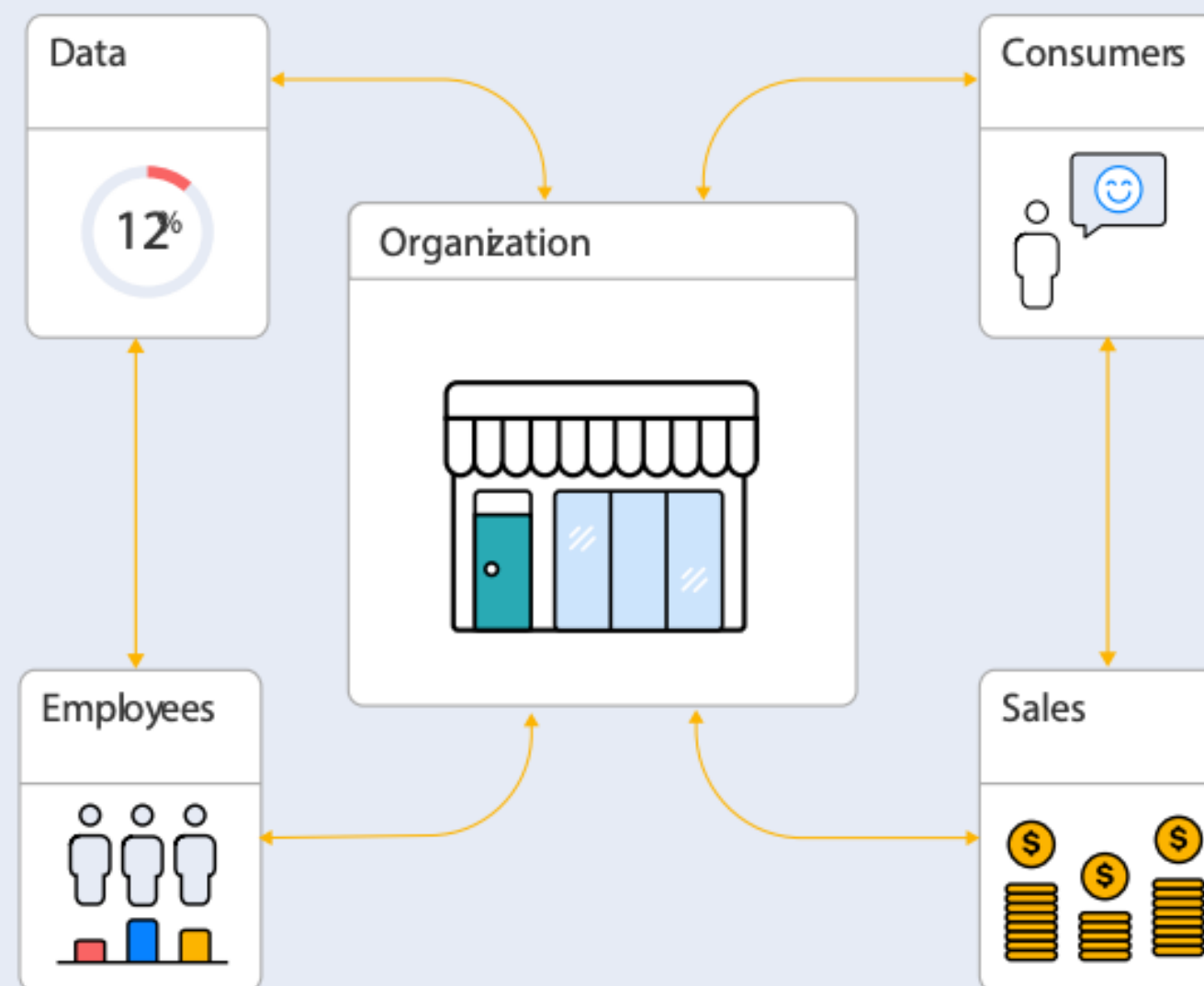
As noted, some brands may lack the necessary resources or bandwidth to help them carry the extra load. Understandably, tracking and responding to every review across multiple channels without the help of modern technology is nearly impossible.

For this reason, more operators are implementing stronger, simpler, all-in-one data solutions that give them and their teams the ability to handle every customer review in one place; track sentiment across all major sites and platforms; connect with customers in a timely manner; monitor, request, and respond to customer reviews to improve ratings and review volumes; scale response efforts; and more.

For example, a solution that contains an AI-powered natural language processor can comb through online reviews in record speed, analyzing text or speech input and performing tasks such as language translation, sentiment analysis, text summarization, question answering, and more.

In conclusion, companies that know how to tune in to the voice of customers—negative, positive, AND neutral—are those mastering the feedback economy, an economy driven by opinions, comments, and reviews. They go through all reviews with a fine-tooth comb, and respond accordingly, ensuring no essential information is missed.





Empowering leading restaurant brands in their relentless pursuit of best-in-class hospitality with the industry's greatest source for experience intelligence.

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## About GuestXM

Gain full control of your brand—from how it's perceived to how it performs—so you know exactly what impact your team can make to transform your brand's hospitality and deliver remarkable restaurant experiences.

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