

The Auto Dealer's Original Fixed Operations Resource

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# Fixed ops

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Why Do You Hate Me, Yelp?

# THE REVIEWS ARE IN!

## WHY DO YOU HATE ME, YELP?

BY PETER MARTIN

Everybody knows them, but no one wants to acknowledge them. They've been the topic of many heated conversations. Some people say, "They'll be gone in a few months." Well, it's been a few months -- years even -- and they haven't gone away. In fact, they're even bigger than they were before. Fueled by fear from businesses and words from the public, it looks like they're here to stay. You know who I'm talking about. That online review site everyone loves to hate: Yelp.



The main problem with Yelp is positive reviews are getting filtered. People believe that if you're not paying to play, Yelp is automatically filtering your reviews. Once claiming your review on Yelp and optimizing it, Yelp will call you and solicit that you advertise with them. The claim is, once you decline, you start to see your positive reviews getting filtered off the main page. Yelp will continue to hound you to advertise with them, sometimes calling several times a week. Then you'll start to notice your competitor's listing showing up as an adver-

tisement on your page, just under your heading. Yelp will call you again and say something along the lines of, "If you pay for this listing, all ads will be removed." Most people would call this bullying, but in reality it's just a really good business plan. And it's not against the law. If other dealers in your area are paying for Yelp advertising, it only makes sense for their ads to show up on your local listing since you aren't paying to have ads removed. Facebook does the same thing. It's called Geo-advertising and is very effective.

Some businesses are going around this problem by not claiming their listing at all. The reasoning is, if you don't claim your listing, Yelp doesn't call you to solicit for advertising. If they don't call you, they can't filter you if you don't pay. This may seem like a good idea, but it's not. If your business doesn't claim its Yelp listing, there is no way for you to fully optimize it and increase your search engine rating across the web. You are also running the risk of misinformation being populated on your listing, not to mention the opportunity to respond back to your customers thanking them for their feedback. Whether you are responding to negative or positive feedback, it shows the customer that you are indeed listening to them and you care about what they have to say. This also increases your buzz rating for search engines. People are more likely to air their feelings masked in the anonymity of the

Internet, especially if they see the business owners valuing their feedback and responding.

### The Importance of Online Reviews

The Internet has changed the way people communicate forever. People are connecting to the web through their computers and mobile devices. Word-of-mouth is no longer spread from ear to ear, but from screen to screen. It's no wonder that online reviews have such a major impact on how successful your business is.

Ignoring Yelp will not make it go away. People will still visit your page and leave reviews whether you are active with it or not. A full star bump on Yelp can increase your revenue by up to 9 percent. So why not be pro-active and manage the reviews you are receiving? Sitting and doing nothing isn't an option if you want to keep a successful business.

In the automotive world, 40% of people do not have a repair shop they trust. 80% of people felt they were overcharged for Service at a dealership and over 90% believed they could save at least 10% by visiting an independent repair shop. Clearly, online reviews are vastly important to the automotive world. Before even setting foot in your dealership, a person will look you up online first. If they find a bunch of reviews of people saying they felt overcharged, or had a bad experience, the potential customer is going to look elsewhere.

The average person will change their mind when they read 1-3 negative reviews. With over 13 million active Yelpers logging in and posting their opinions, Yelp is the most active site people visit when searching for a service.

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#### **You Must Know Your Enemy Before You Can Beat it**

Since its inception in July of 2004, Yelp has become the go-to place for people looking to find in-depth views on the business world. The concept was an on-line city guide that allows “real people” to write “real reviews” about nearly any type of business. While other review sites have come and gone, Yelp has remained at the top.

While other review sites are cluttered with spam and ads, Yelp has kept their platform minimally affected. The ads they do have are not heavy in graphics and their pages load quickly. The fast-paced world doesn’t have time to wait through a loading time of more than 30 seconds while an ad we don’t want to see pops up and requires them to make extra clicks to get to the information they are seeking. Yelp has kept that annoyance out of their pages. It’s clean and user-friendly.

Yelp also puts an extreme emphasis on long-form reviews. A reviewer simply stating that a business has “the best hot dogs” isn’t informative enough. When looking up information on a business, people are looking for in-depth information. Why are the hot dogs so good? What’s the atmosphere like at the restaurant? Is it fun with games, or low-key and relaxed? What about the prices?

People want to know the answers to these questions from someone outside the business. Most people don’t trust what the business has to say about themselves. But they do trust what other people have to say. Especially when everyone says the same thing. This kind of information targeting is what separates Yelp from the rest.

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The advertisement features a sequence of four illustrations showing the evolution of man from a gorilla-like ancestor to a modern human. Below this, a hand holds a tablet displaying the Xtime service interface. The interface shows a 'SCHEDULE YOUR SERVICE' screen with three service packages: '40,000 miles', '40,000 Dealer Recommended', and '40,000 Dealer Premium'. The '40,000 Dealer Premium' package is highlighted with a 'Save \$20 with coupon' offer, reducing the price from \$189.95 to \$169.95. The interface also includes a 'Choose individual services, repairs and accessories' section and a 'Describe what's going on with your vehicle...' field.

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### Why is Yelp So Important Anyways?

Yelp has huge ties to both Google and Yahoo search engines. Your Yelp listing shows up within the top page of search results no matter what. It's a vastly important listing that every business should be utilizing to their advantage. Yelp is a huge player in the reputation management world and it's here to stay. If people are reviewing your business on Yelp, you can be sure it's listed in Google search results.

Yelp is directly connected to Siri on the iPhone as well as Apple maps. Since half of smartphone owners have an iPhone, the effects of Yelp on your business is even greater.

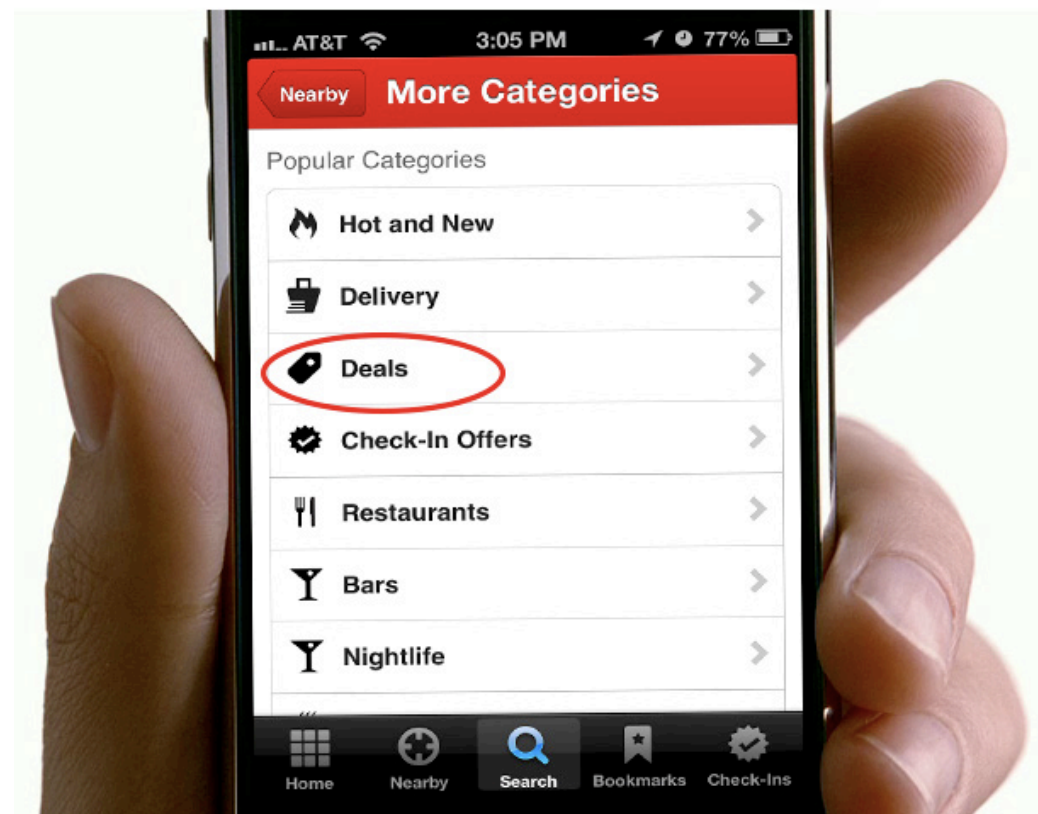
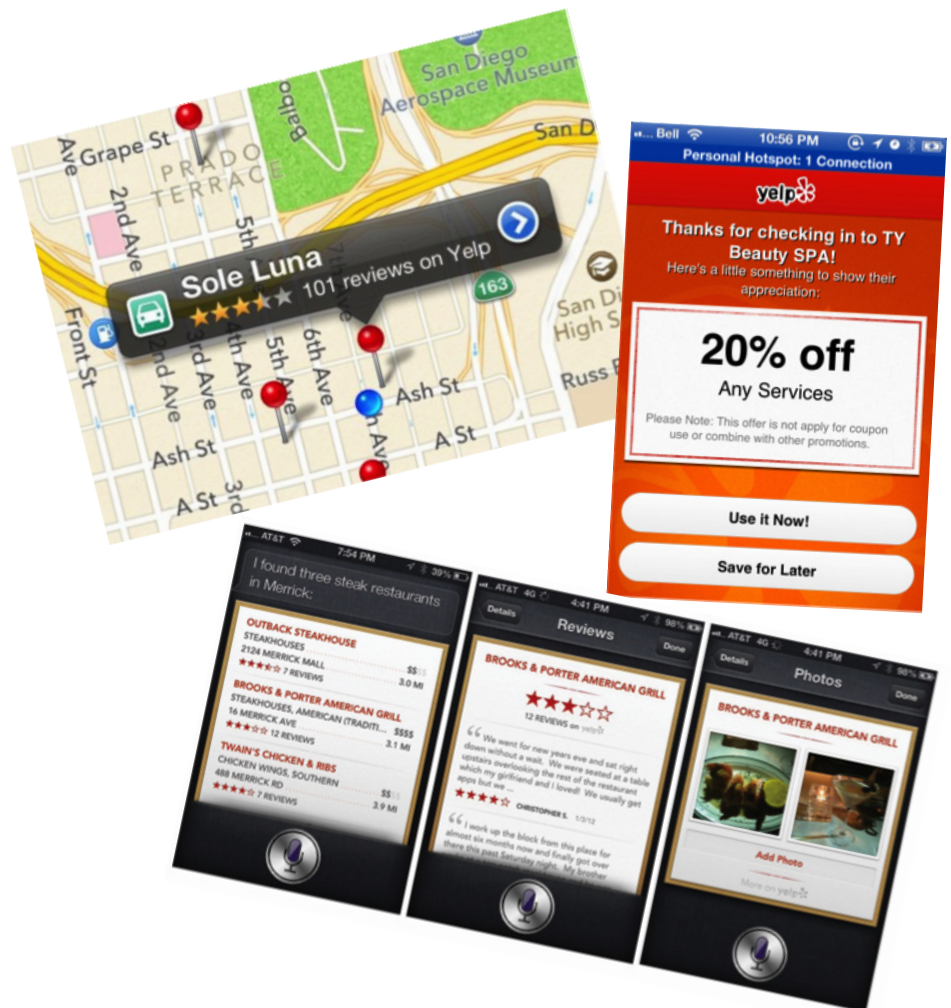
Whenever someone asks Siri to find XX business near them, Siri automatically pulls up businesses with Yelp reviews attached. If you pull up Apple maps and activate your tracking, you can view businesses in your area who all have Yelp reviews automatically attached. Yelp has huge connections in the area of mobile and online reputation.

### The Yelper App

Now that we've shown you the importance of Yelp, there are a few things that you as a business owner can utilize as part of your marketing plan. Yelp has a very user-friendly app on all iOS devices (Apple products) as well as on Android devices. Customers can easily pull up the app, get a listing of businesses near them and read the reviews posted. When it first came out, customers could only post tips about a business while visiting. A tip is the mobile version of writing a review on a browser.

Yelpers can also use the check-in feature on the app, which boosts your business activity within Yelp when people do a search for local businesses in their area. Some businesses offer a perk to check-in at the business, such as 10% off. Auto dealerships should be utilizing this tool for their Service Departments. A simple coupon for a \$19 oil change with check-in can be highly effective.

Another feature worth mentioning about the Yelp app is the Yelp Deals category.



Yelp deals are businesses who pay Yelp to advertise a special, just like businesses do for Groupon. The difference is Yelpers can only purchase one voucher per person and up to 3 for other Yelpers as gifts. There are no upfront costs for the business owner, but once a deal is sold, Yelp will retain 30 percent of the price for each deal sold.

### Getting past the dreaded filter

While Yelp doesn't release the particulars to their filtering system, we can examine the patterns and hypothesize what it takes to get a review published and not filtered.

1. A reviewer with more than one review under their belt is more likely to get published.
2. A review that goes in-depth about the experience is more likely to get published.
3. The reviewer's IP address they are posting from must be in the geographical area of the business being reviewed.
4. Reviewer needs to have their profile optimized, including picture and city.
5. Reviewer should be friends with other Yelpers.

These 5 guidelines are clear in every review that is published for all the companies we examined. It seems that the first guideline had the most sway and the last one had the least sway. It also seems that whether a review was marked "useful," "funny" or "cool" has an impact on if the review stays or not.

There are four reasons a review may disappear:

1. It was removed by the reviewer who wrote it.
2. The review could have violated Yelp's Terms of Service by containing second-hand hearsay, personal attacks, lack of relevance or a conflict of interest.
3. As a result of the company's automated review filter that looks for suspicious patterns such as rants and raves from friends and competitors.
4. Yelpers can also flag reviews that seem suspect and Yelp's staff then reviews them.

Although many business owners argue over this, the review filtering algorithm

is an automated system. No human is able to manipulate it. A sales team may be able to move reviews around on the front page, but they cannot directly filter them.

Following these guidelines and identifying active yelpers will boost your business ratings as well as your SEO. It's very clear that it's a new age of online reviews and Yelp has staked its claim at the top.



Peter "webdoc" Martin is renowned for creating innovative and cutting-edge programs, systems and tools to facilitate the auto dealer's success in today's market. Martin is the President of Cactus Sky Communications and the Co-Founder of ADT (Automotive Digital Training), a comprehensive web-based video-on-demand training and testing platform for the auto industry. Cactus Sky Communications is recognized as one of the premier digital marketing companies in the country.

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