



The Right Way to Respond to Negative Reviews

By Michelle Seitzer

During his time in the US Coast Guard, my husband served as a DC — damage controlman — and did everything from repairing holes on a ship to welding new watertight doors for a historic lighthouse. He wasn't the go-to guy in a crisis (i.e. securing an active leak out on the open seas): he was part of the preservation team, strategically maintaining equipment, buildings, and boats for the long haul.

One negative review, no matter how scathing, isn't going to sink your ship. So don't panic: follow these damage control steps from Senior Housing Forum partner and [online reviews experts, Caring.com](https://www.caring.com).

To Remove or Not to Remove

When a negative review shows up on your community's online listing, avoid the knee-jerk "remove immediately" reaction. Yes, you should be aware when any review — positive or negative — comes across your page. But your response is way more important than any claim the reviewer made.

Denise Graab, Caring.com's Director of Industry Marketing, says there's some debate among online reputation experts as to how best to respond to a negative review. Some say never request removal, others, like Graab, believe there are situations that warrant removal. "Given the influence that online reviews have in helping families find the best communities, we don't want factually inaccurate reviews on our platform," says Graab. "So if a senior living community sees a fact-based error(s) in a review, we want them to notify us."

What to Do With a Negative Review

The fact is, when you read or hear something even remotely negative about your community, you get defensive — a normal, natural reaction. But Graab says a [recent Pew Research Center survey](#) revealed many Americans struggle to distinguish fact from fiction, and she's found the same principle to be true in terms of contesting negative reviews.

Another mistake people make is to assume the review is fake because it's negative, says Graab. "That's a common objection we get, 'We don't have this resident, or we don't know this person; it's a fake review — take it down! In many of those cases, the review came from someone we referred to their community for a tour and, in some cases, is from someone for whom the move-in was confirmed!'"

Remember: responding to negative reviews is all about preservation — it's reputation management. Read the review as carefully and as objectively as possible. Put yourself in the reviewer's shoes. Try to think like an outsider, as someone who's never stepped foot in your community. Is the reviewer simply expressing an opinion: "the carpeting was ostentatious, impractical, and ugly" vs. a fact: "the community is located along a noisy, busy main road"?

Ostentatious carpeting is not likely to make or break a person's decision about a place. And yes, being located on a noisy, busy road is a fact that could deter some. But you can't pick up and move your community. And guess what? Others may not find it to be a nuisance at all.

Here are a few more examples of fact vs. opinion-based reviews:

Contesting Reviews – Fact vs. Opinion	
FACT	OPINION
"They serve meatball sandwiches seven days a week."	"The food is terrible."
"There's only one caregiver available on the weekends, she's female, and my dad wants a male."	"I didn't think they had enough staff to meet my dad's needs."
"They only clean the carpets once a year."	The carpets weren't clean and smelled like urine."

Tip: Read review guidelines – Use them to guide removal requests.

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Who Cares?

So should you respond to the person complaining about the ostentatious carpeting, if you can't change their mind anyway?

When it comes to any negative reviews without fact-based errors, Graab suggests publishing a response that's empathetic and professional, and take the conversation offline — i.e. offer to speak directly to the individual about their concerns.

You never know: the individual may have a loved one who struggles with depth perception and would find the carpet hard to navigate. By taking a few minutes to address their review, whether it was purely unfounded opinion or not, you're taking the high road.

And remember, you're the one who's in this for the long haul. "We encourage senior living communities to consider other visitors to the listing who will read the review and the response," says Graab.

Respond More, Get More

Still think responding to reviews is a waste of time? You're entitled to that opinion, but the facts are:

1. Responding to negative reviews helps qualify your community for the Caring Stars 2019 award.

2. Responding to reviews can actually generate more positive reviews, per this [Harvard Business Review case study](#).
3. Responding to reviews influences your prospects, according to the Caregiver Journey Survey stats below.



How Can Caring.com Help?

When your marketing team is busy giving tours, creating social media campaigns, analyzing metrics, and more, finding time to conscientiously respond to negative and positive reviews isn't easy.

That's where Caring.com comes in, helping industry partners do online reputation management more effectively — and avoid embarrassing snafus like these (which can certainly happen when you're pressed for time):

Mistakes in Negative Review Response

"We've **never had a John Smith** visit our facility. We always have adequate staffing...Our **residents are always clean** and cared for. This is a person that is upset about something and wants to show it this way."

"Staff is deeply saddened and disturbed by this review. We would hope that if someone felt this way they would **approch** our administrator to correct these issues. We hope that you as a reader of these reviews would stop in **yourselves** to **check on the accuracy** of these accusations. You do not have to call **a head** to tour our building."

"This review is from a **disturb, depressed, dishonest and very confused person**...her mother lived in the facility for five years and she came a total of four times. She gets along with no one, and perhaps is trying to find comfort...she is **throwing her emesis on the facility** that took excellent care of her mother. Her siblings called and thanked us."

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“These are real responses we received and did not publish,” says Graab. “In the first instance: ‘John Smith’ was the anonymous screen name of the reviewer, and it's hard to believe that everyone at the community is clean 100% of the time.” The second one? “I think it’s obvious why we rejected it,” she says.

There are a few important lessons to note from the third one, Graab points out:

1. Never attack the reviewer.
2. Never reveal private information.
3. Remember, each member of the family is entitled to their own opinion and their own review (“At Caring.com, we don't take down reviews just because that person's siblings have a different opinion of the community,” Graab said.).

Senior living communities also need to be professional in their email correspondence with the review platform, says Graab. “Any of those emails can be subpoenaed if there is legal action resulting from the review.”

Don't Just CYA, Engage

Another mistake Graab sees occasionally in senior living? A community or chain puts the same templated response on every negative review. “Their lawyers probably advised them accordingly, or gave them specific language they could use,” she says. “But that's unfortunate, because consumers visiting multiple listings do notice when they see the same template blasted across multiple reviews.” Instead of just going through the motions, show them you’re listening, show them you care, and engage in real dialogue with your prospects and consumers. They’ll notice.



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