Bad Reviews:
Why people write them, and what they expect

Analyzing the online review writing process of
over 1,000 consumers

Effects of leaving a bad review

If you've ever ordered your morning coffee and felt uninspired by the request to participate in an online survey or leave a social review regarding your experience, you've probably didn't have a particularly noteworthy experience. If you're willing to take time out of your day to leave online feedback, it's usually because you want to warn people about a bad in encounter, or to help them make a better buying decision.
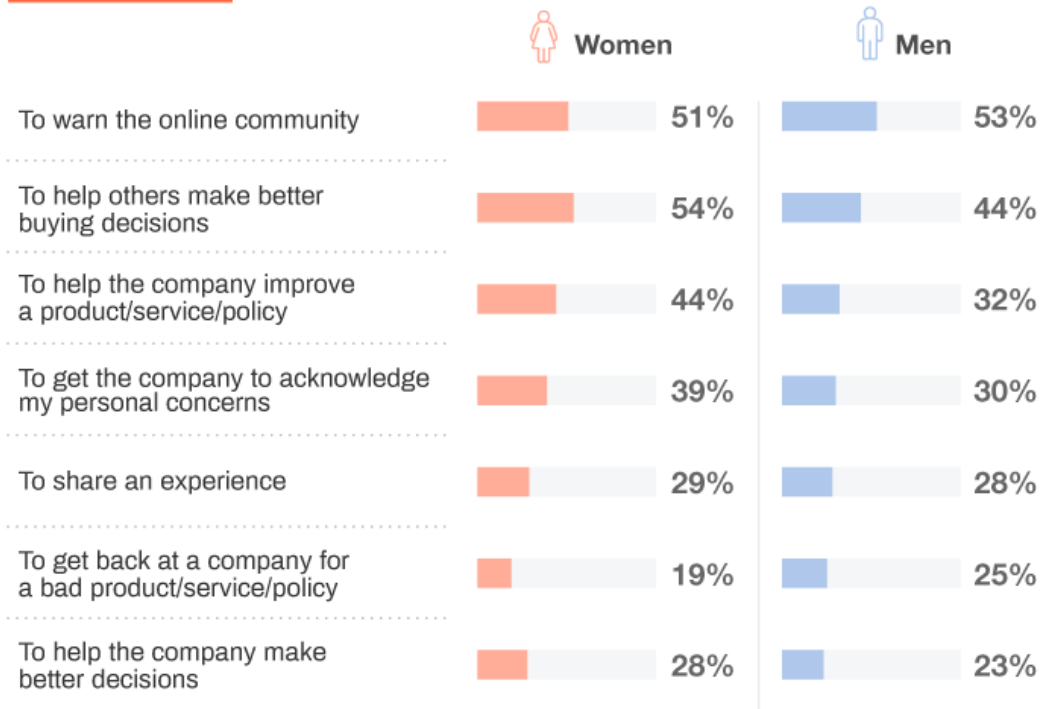
In a world of viral marketing and social influence, online reviews have the power to make or break businesses, but they aren't the only companies paying attention. Reviews have become such a pivotal part of the buying experience for so many customers, that even tech goliaths like Apple can't help but play an active role in responding to more critical responses.

So what compels us to leave reviews online, and what are we really hoping to achieve by contributing to the public discussion of a brand, experience, or product? **To find out, we surveyed over 1,000 European and North-American consumers about why they leave bad reviews, how good experiences inspire them to give feedback, and the kinds of reactions and rewards they sometimes expect to receive as a result of their critiques.**
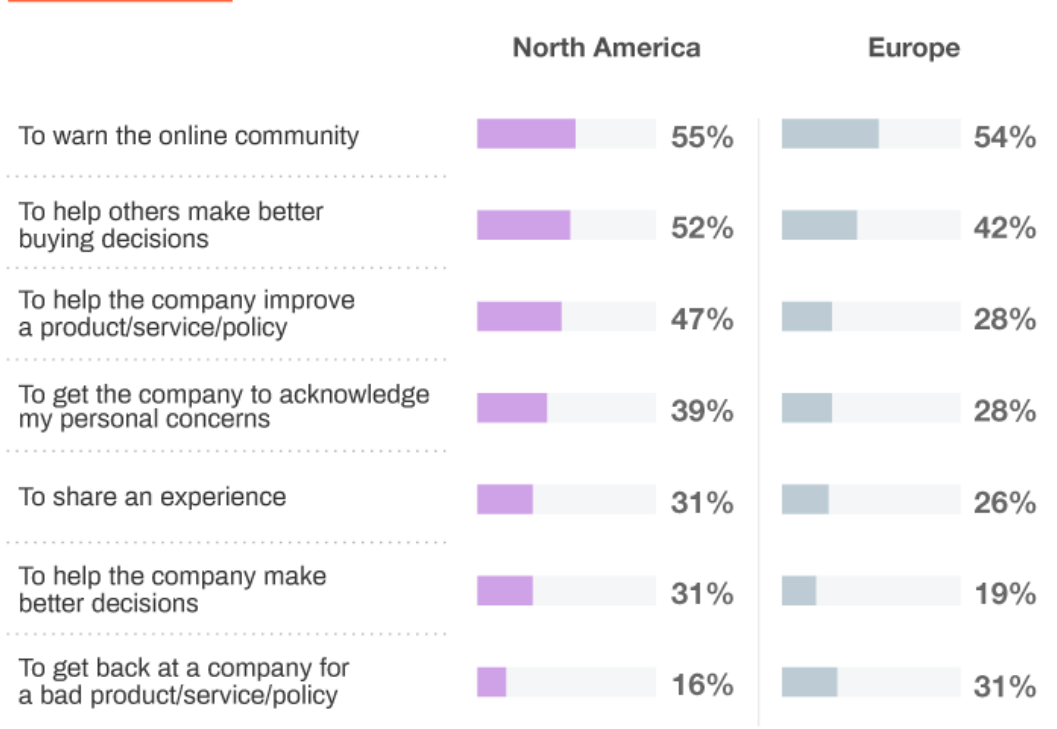
Think the online review phenomena might sometimes have ulterior motives? Read on to see what we uncovered.

Reasons for leaving bad reviews

By Gender

	Women	Men
To warn the online community	51%	53%
To help others make better buying decisions	54%	44%
To help the company improve a product/service/policy	44%	32%
To get the company to acknowledge my personal concerns	39%	30%
To share an experience	29%	28%
To get back at a company for a bad product/service/policy	19%	25%
To help the company make better decisions	28%	23%

By Region

	North America	Europe
To warn the online community	55%	54%
To help others make better buying decisions	52%	42%
To help the company improve a product/service/policy	47%	28%
To get the company to acknowledge my personal concerns	39%	28%
To share an experience	31%	26%
To help the company make better decisions	31%	19%
To get back at a company for a bad product/service/policy	16%	31%

Compelling experiences

Research indicates overall customer satisfaction with in-store shopping continues to increase, but so do consumers' expectations about what a good shopping experience looks like in the first place. Consumers want retailers to have better technology, offer more services, and establish better personal connections.

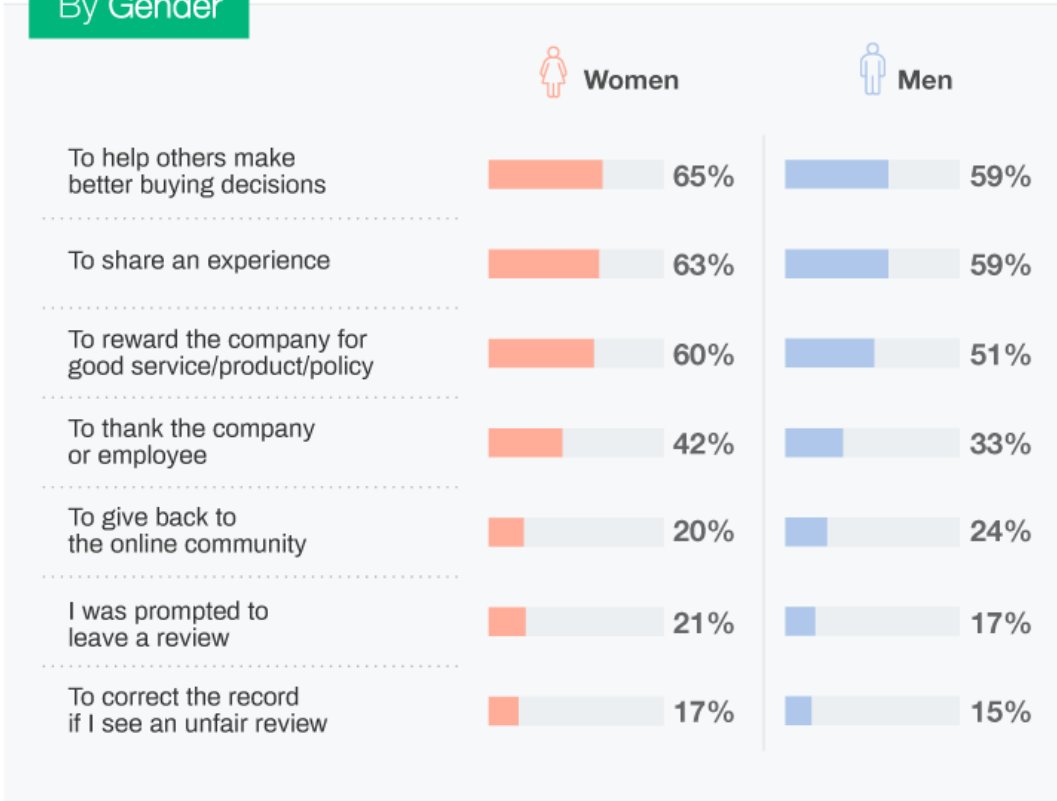So what happens when the product or purchase doesn't quite live up to its expectations?

You might consider leaving a negative review.

While the occasional bad mark can be good for helping customers build trust with a brand, too many can be a clear indication that something's gone seriously wrong.
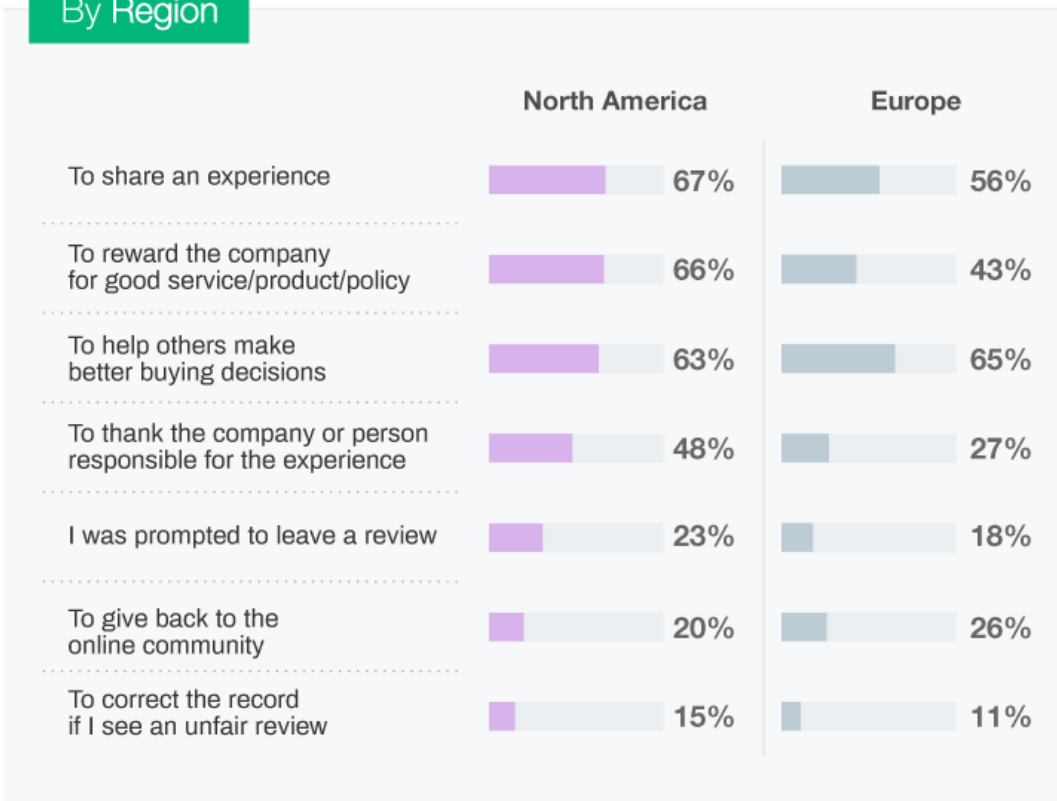
Overwhelmingly, more than half of both women and men admitted they leave negative comments about businesses simply as a warning to the online community. Other reasons included helping establish proper expectations and to steer buyers away from making a purchase they'll later regret. Women were most likely (54 percent) to report doing it to help other people make better buying decisions. While some wanted to help companies improve their services and others wanted to share their overall experience, very few seemed to have malicious intent. **Less than 1 in 5 women and 1 in 4 men shared negative feedback to get back at a company for a bad policy or product.**

Reasons for leaving good reviews

By Gender

	Women	Men
To help others make better buying decisions	65%	59%
To share an experience	63%	59%
To reward the company for good service/product/policy	60%	51%
To thank the company or employee	42%	33%
To give back to the online community	20%	24%
I was prompted to leave a review	21%	17%
To correct the record if I see an unfair review	17%	15%

By Region

	North America	Europe
To share an experience	67%	56%
To reward the company for good service/product/policy	66%	43%
To help others make better buying decisions	63%	65%
To thank the company or person responsible for the experience	48%	27%
I was prompted to leave a review	23%	18%
To give back to the online community	20%	26%
To correct the record if I see an unfair review	15%	11%

The power of positivity

A business doesn't have to have exclusively glowing reviews in order to help compel people to buy its products or frequent its store. Good or bad, a vast majority of customers will leave businesses a review when prompted, and most consumers have the same agenda for their positive comments as their negative reviews: helping other people make better purchases.

Among women, helping other people make better buying decisions was the leading reason for spending time writing a positive review for a product or service, while men were tied for both better buying know-how and simply exercising the opportunity to share their experiences overall.

Both men and women were sometimes compelled by the opportunity to reward companies or employees for good service, and others simply wanted to give back to their online communities.
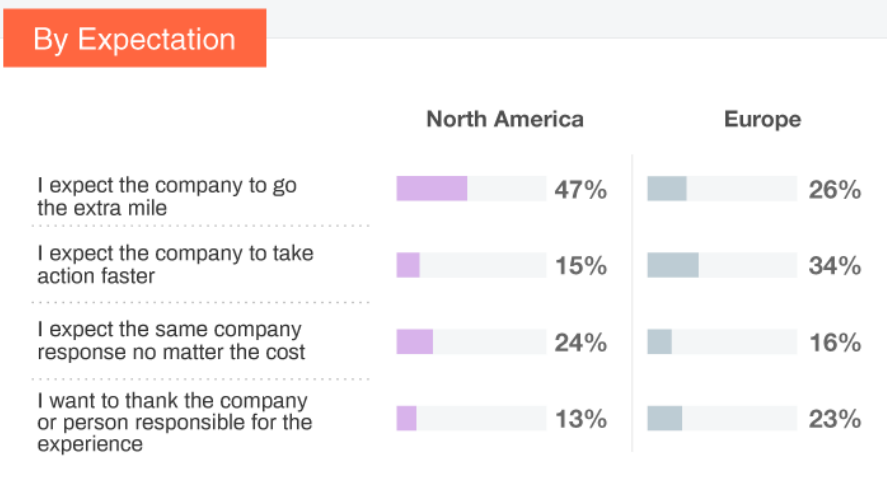
Still, online review etiquette may not entirely translate across borders. **North-American consumers were almost twice as likely to use the power of their positive feedback as an opportunity to thank a specific staff member for their efforts.**

Customer expectations after leaving bad reviews

Overall ···

48%
I don't expect any company response to my review

34%
I expect a company comment on my review

32%
I expect a private message or email regarding my review

7%
I expect a request for a phone call from the company

By Income Level

	Under $15,000	$15,000–$29,999	$30,000–$49,999	$50,000–$74,999	$75,000–$99,999	$100,000+
I don't expect any company response to my review	52%	52%	43%	38%	51%	31%
I expect a company comment on my review	31%	32%	40%	41%	19%	50%
I expect a private message or email regarding my review	31%	26%	33%	39%	38%	46%
I expect a request for a phone call from the company	5%	5%	9%	8%	8%	19%
I expect to get free merchandise	1%	2%	2%	4%	0%	8%

By Expectation

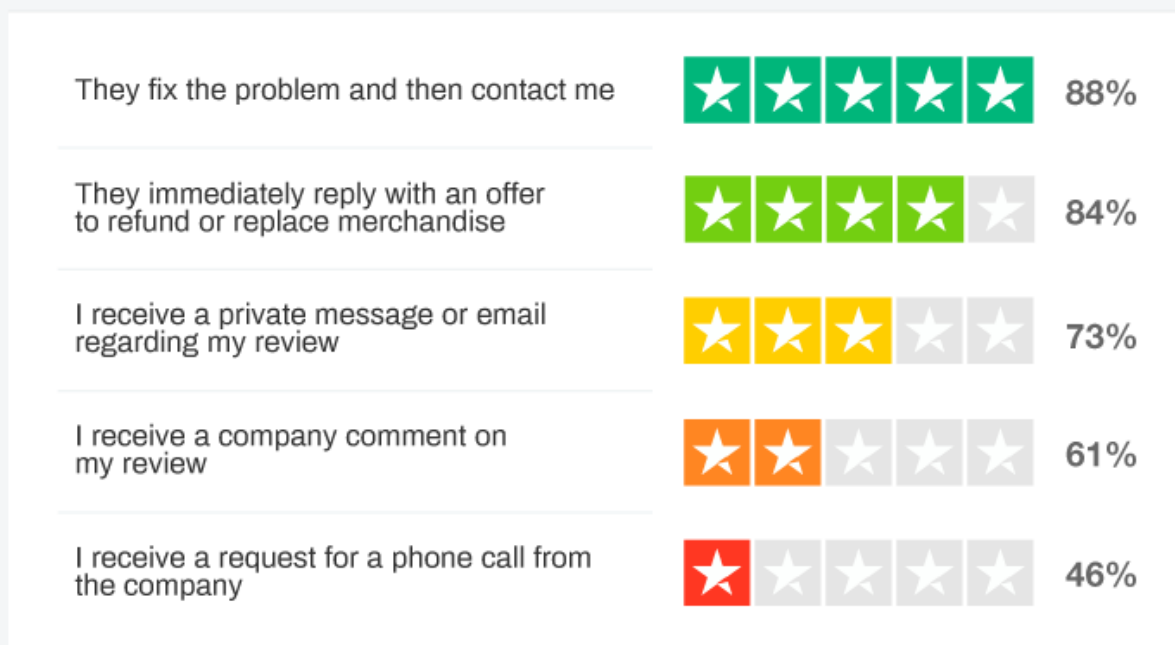|	North America	Europe
I expect the company to go the extra mile	47%	26%
I expect the company to take action faster	15%	34%
I expect the same company response no matter the cost	24%	16%
I want to thank the company or person responsible for the experience	13%	23%

Requested retribution?

Standard customer service code dictates a simple truth most businesses try to live by: The customer is always right. Even if the average employee doesn't always agree, it's a common adage that's been designed to remind brands to keep the customer – and their grievances – in proper perspective. But does that sometimes embolden consumers to expect more than they're entitled to?

While a majority of people who've made the effort to leave a bad review for a company or their services generally don't expect a response to their comments, roughly 1 in 3 expected either a company comment or private message. In some cases, people may even be expecting compensation in the form of merchandise or credit to help make up for their poor experience. **Less common overall, we found it was consumers with the highest annual income who felt the most entitled to free merchandise in response to their negative feedback.**

Among North-American consumers, this sentiment was especially strong when asked about expensive purchases. Nearly half admitted they envisioned companies wanting to go the "extra mile" to correct their bad experiences. Only 1 in 4 Europeans had the same perspective in contrast.

Satisfactory responses to bad reviews

They fix the problem and then contact me	★★★★★	88%
They immediately reply with an offer to refund or replace merchandise	★★★★★	84%
I receive a private message or email regarding my review	★★★★★	73%
I receive a company comment on my review	★★★★★	61%
I receive a request for a phone call from the company	★★★★★	46%

Favored feedback

With so many people expecting to receive personalized responses to their negative reviews, it's fair to wonder how they want those conversations to be handled. There are plenty of examples for business owners on the best ways to address public criticism, and most experts recommend refraining from defensive comments and focusing on finding a way to fix the customer's concerns.

In general, that's exactly the kind of response most consumers are looking for. **A vast majority – 88 percent – of people voted for companies to fix the issue at hand and then contact them regarding the solution.** Slightly fewer (84 percent) expected an immediate response with the offer to refund or replace the product in question.
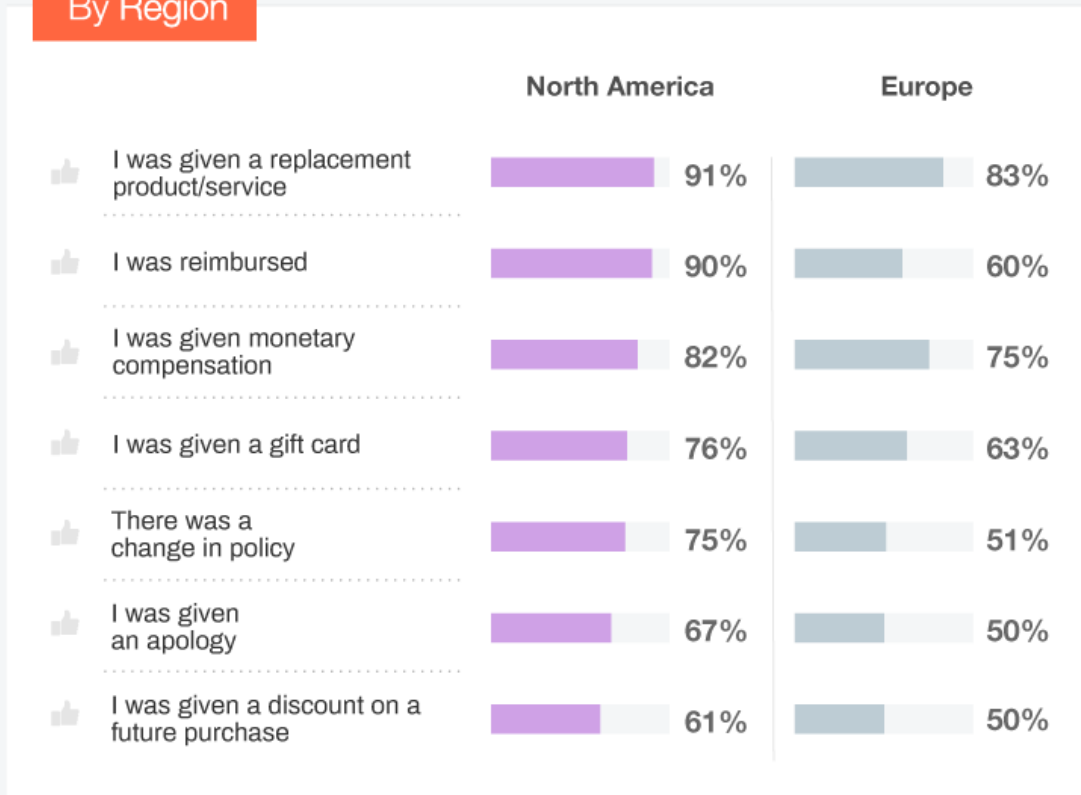
Still, for some consumers, a simple reply would suffice as a response to their negative feedback. Nearly 3 in 4 would be happy with a private message or email, and **61 percent expected a company to publicly comment on their review**

Significant rewards

Most Satisfactory Company Actions to Bad Reviews

Overall ⋯

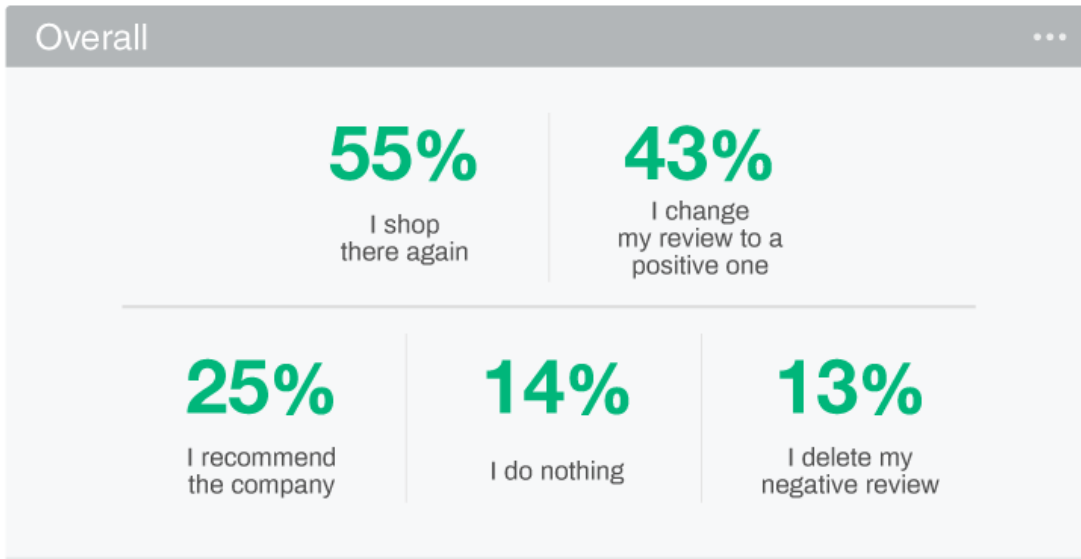| **85%**	**80%**	**72%**
I was given a replacement product/service	I was given monetary compensation	I was given a gift card
65%	**60%**	**53%**
There was a change in policy	I was given an apology	I was given a discount on a future purchase

By Region

	North America	Europe
👍 I was given a replacement product/service	91%	83%
👍 I was reimbursed	90%	60%
👍 I was given monetary compensation	82%	75%
👍 I was given a gift card	76%	63%
👍 There was a change in policy	75%	51%
👍 I was given an apology	67%	50%
👍 I was given a discount on a future purchase	61%	50%

Compensation that counts

Depending on how bad an interaction is or how poorly a product performs, in some cases, a reply from the company regarding a negative online review simply isn't sufficient to resolve the issue. Occasionally, consumers expect to be compensated monetarily to help make up for the perceived offense.

Overall, 85 percent of people believed a replacement of the product or service would be in order following a negative review, and 80 percent would prefer being given monetary compensation for their time and inconvenience. While others wanted a reimbursement for their purchases or a gift card to help make up for the experience, nearly 2 in 3 wanted companies to go even further by instituting policy changes storewide to help resolve their concerns.
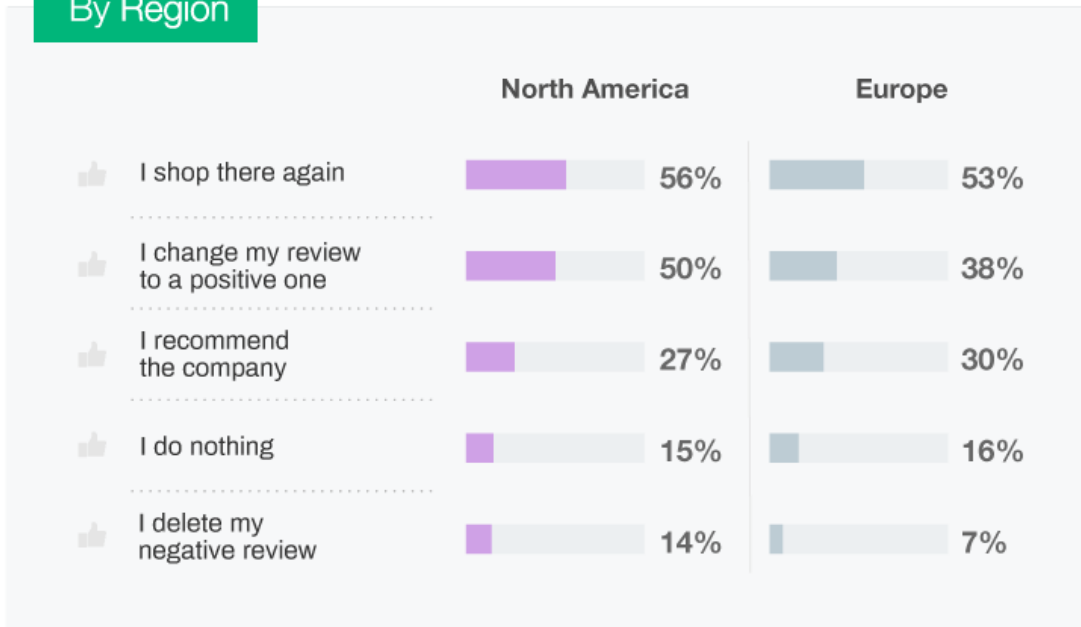
Regardless of the extent of their requests, from replacement on faulty products to discounts on future purchases, we found **North-American consumers were more inclined to expect these kinds of rewards for their negative reviews than European shoppers.**

Customers
react positively

Common Actions of Customers Satisfied With Company Responses

Overall ···

55%
I shop
there again

43%
I change
my review to a
positive one

25%
I recommend
the company

14%
I do nothing

13%
I delete my
negative review

By Region

	North America	Europe
👍 I shop there again	56%	53%
👍 I change my review to a positive one	50%	38%
👍 I recommend the company	27%	30%
👍 I do nothing	15%	16%
👍 I delete my negative review	14%	7%

Long-term impact

Customers may have high expectations for what they expect from their in-store and online shopping experience and even higher expectations for how companies should respond (including how quickly) when something's gone wrong enough to warrant a negative online review. And how many customers feel their concerns have been handled poorly can have a long-term effect on their relationship with that brand.
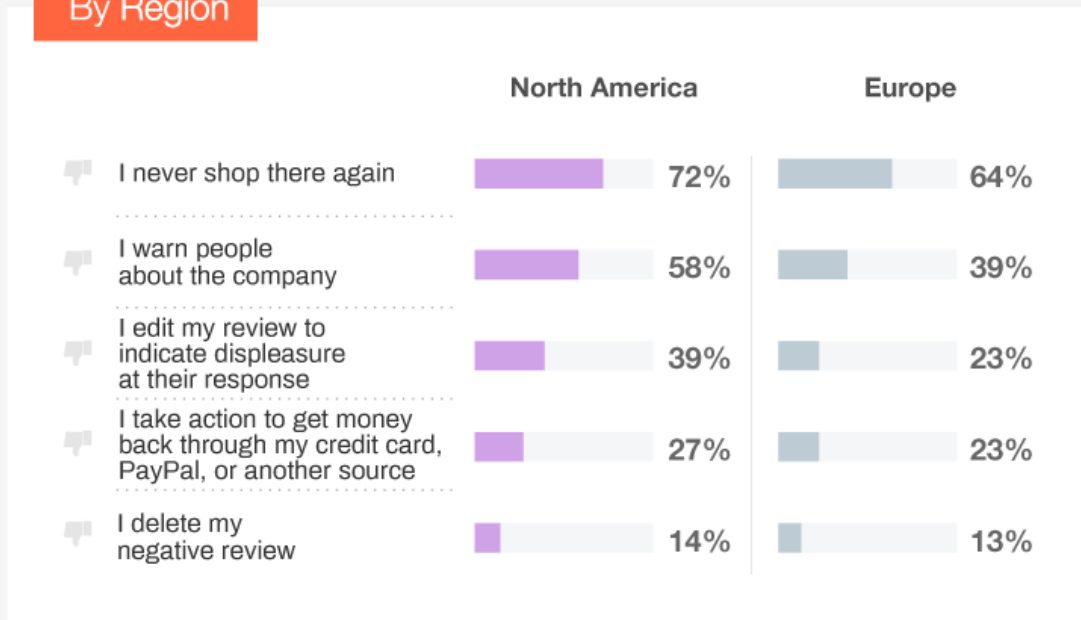
When customers feel their reviews have been responded to appropriately, more than half admitted to shopping at the same location again. More than 2 in 5 customers would even go so far as to reverse their overall rating of the company and edit their review into a more positive critique. For 25 percent of people, how well companies respond to criticism can even help transition them from detractors to overall promoters of that company.

Customers react badly

Common Actions of Customers Dissatisfied With Company Responses

Overall   •••

69%
I never shop there again

50%
I warn people about the company

33%
I edit my review to indicate displeasure at their response

26%
I take action to get money back through my credit card, PayPal, or another source

11%
I do nothing

By Region

	North America	Europe
👎 I never shop there again	72%	64%
👎 I warn people about the company	58%	39%
👎 I edit my review to indicate displeasure at their response	39%	23%
👎 I take action to get money back through my credit card, PayPal, or another source	27%	23%
👎 I delete my negative review	14%	13%

Critical customers

In contrast, failing to respond appropriately sometimes emboldens customers to take further action against a company. **More than 2 in 3 people who were unsatisfied with a company response to their feedback admitted they wouldn't shop with that establishment again, and half would warn others to stay away from the company too**. And if they really believed a refund was in order, 1 in 4 would go through their credit card company to contest the original charge themselves.

Have you exaggerated a bad review?

By Region

6% of North Americans and **14%** of Europeans said they have exaggerated a bad review in hopes if getting a stronger company response

By Gender and Generation

Women   Men

Millennials	Generation X	Baby Boomers
10% 19%	3% 2%	4% 11%
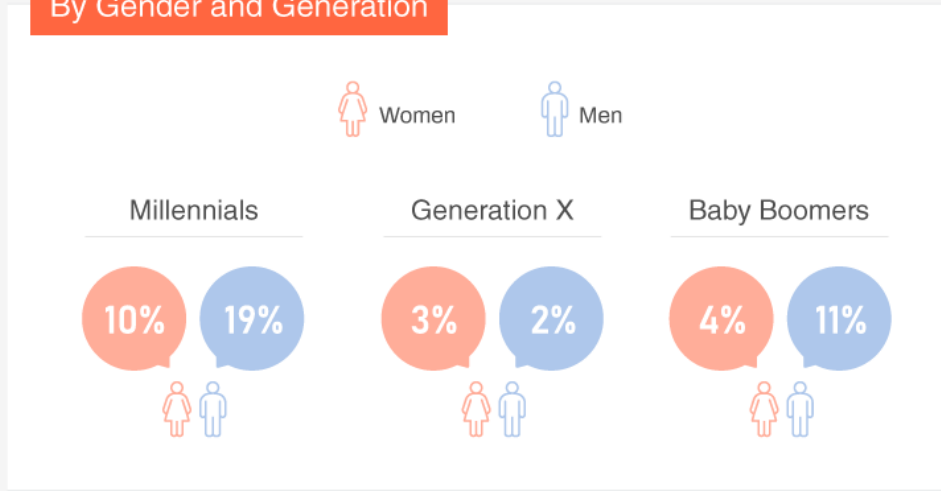
Percentage Worried About Companies Taking Legal Action Against a Bad Review

By Region

4% of North Americans and **7%** of Europeans said they've worried about a company taking legal action in response to their reviews

By Gender and Generation

Women   Men

Millennials	Generation X	Baby Boomers
6% 7%	3% 3%	7% 13%
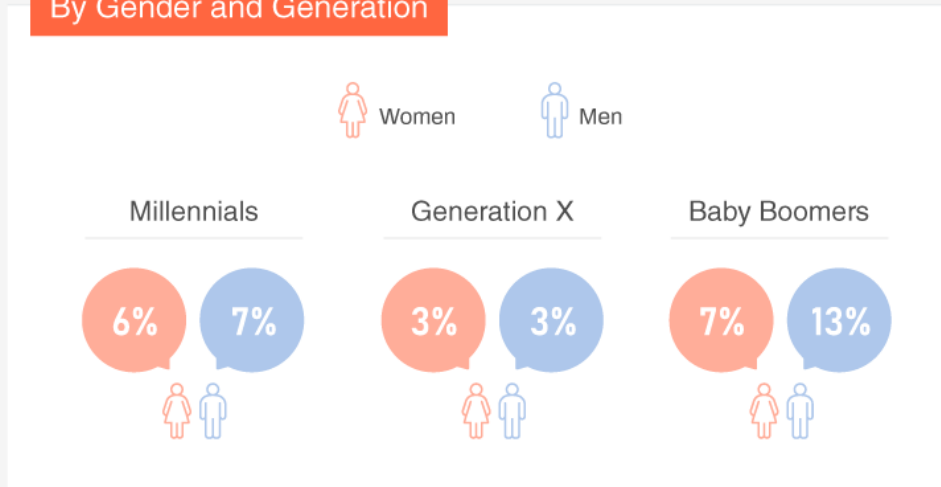
Overstated opinions?

Some may call it a white lie, others may call it a fisherman's tale, but don't be surprised that there is some exaggeration in online reviews by consumers. They're hoping to elicit a stronger response from the company, and it's Europeans more so than Americans who employ this practice.

Across gender and generational groups, it is typically men who find ways to expand upon the truth to garner a response. This can be dangerous, however, as some companies and small businesses have started fighting back against negative online reviews.

One woman in New York found herself being sued by her doctor for roughly $1 million after leaving a review that called the business "very poor and crooked." This is not the only case of companies firing back at negative criticism online – more than ever, businesses are defending their reputations and are willing to go to court to protect their brand.

The power of the customer's perspective

As the face of retail continues to evolve and customer service stands front and center for most brands as a key distinguishing feature between them and their competitors, the average consumer has higher expectations today of what they expect from their shopping experiences and the goods and services they purchase. Nowhere is that more evident than the phenomena that are online reviews. For both good experiences and bad, customers aren't just leaving feedback for the company to see, they expect a response (and sometimes retribution) for their concerns.

At Trustpilot, we know every review has a personal story, and behind that review is an experience that matters. By sharing experiences that help build trust in the community, we help customers buy with confidence and help companies use their online reviews to their advantage. Through shared reviews and experiences, customers can find the very best in everything from pet care to their own health and wellness. See how we can help you build trust and improve your company's reputation among current and potential customers at Trustpilot.com.

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Methodology

For the purposes of this study, we collected responses from 512 North Americans and 492 Europeans using the Clickworker platform. Fifty-five percent of our participants were men, and 45 percent were women. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 73 with a mean of 34 and a standard deviation of 11.5. We excluded participants who selected they never leave reviews for services and/or goods. We weighed the European data by using the 2018 Worldometers report for "European Countries by Population" and took the actual percentage of each country's population and divided it by our sample population. In so doing, we were able to ensure accurate representation of the data due to a large sample size of German respondents.

The data we are presenting rely on self-reporting, and all of the potential biases associated with voluntary participation. Issues with self-reported data include, but are not limited to, the following: selective memory, telescoping, attribution, and exaggeration. No statistical testing was performed, so the claims listed above are based on means alone. As such, this content is purely exploratory, and future research should approach this topic in a more rigorous way.

Source list

- https://www.inc.com/michael-fertik/online-reviews-make-big-difference-small-business.html
- https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2018/04/11/online-reviews-are-the-best-thing-that-ever-happened-to-small-businesses/#7fb4a867740a
- https://techcrunch.com/2017/07/18/apple-now-allows-customer-support-reps-to-respond-to-your-app-store-reviews/
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- https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/true-cost-losing-customer-aaron-pedersen
- https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2018/05/29/million-dollar-online-review-lawsuit/

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