

Win Consumer Confidence by Doing This

A New View of Reviews

By Dr. Jacquelyn Kung



Got reviews?

If not, time to get them. Or risk falling behind competitors in the senior living industry.

Online reviews by residents and family members are an untapped and increasingly critical asset for senior living organizations. New research by Activated Insights demonstrates that the vast majority of residents and their relatives are willing to write positive reviews. This finding comes amid growing evidence that customer ratings on sites such as Google have a powerful influence on buying decisions.

In this report we outline the why, how and what of increasing your online reviews. And we interview a cutting-edge company when it comes to cultivating customer ratings: Brightview Senior Living.

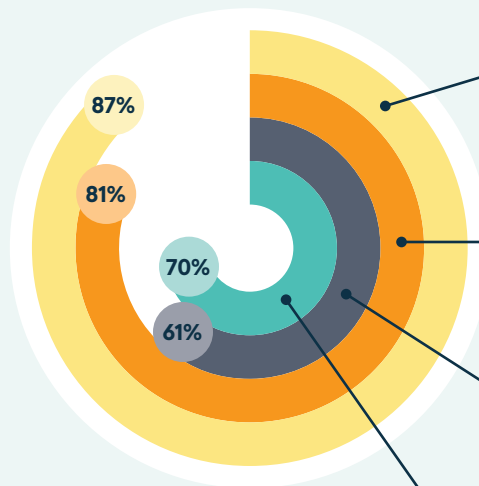
BRIGHTVIEW
SENIOR LIVING

The Why Part 1

Consumer behavior has changed. What used to drive sales—advertising, marketing materials, expert certification and word-of-mouth—is no longer enough. More and more Americans now expect to see online consumer ratings before buying.

Industry research has found that the sheer number of reviews also matters. For instance, one study showed that senior living listings with 15 or more reviews outperformed listings with just 1–2 reviews.ⁱⁱⁱ

15+
5x more inbound leads
8x more move-ins



In 2020, **87%** of consumers read online reviews for local businesses — up from **81%** in 2019. This “Yelp” effect extends to key consumers for senior living: **61%** of Americans 55 and older won't use businesses with an average rating under 4 stars.ⁱ Or consider this statistic from the adjacent field of healthcare: **70%** of patients consider online reviews crucial in selecting healthcare providers.ⁱⁱ

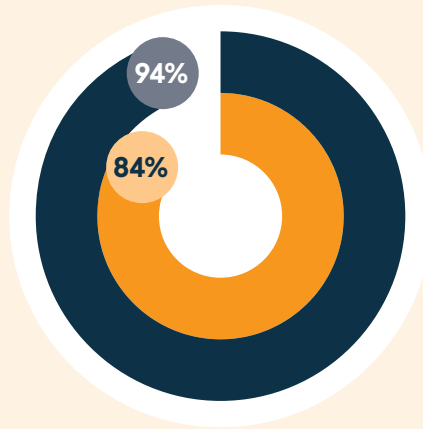


The Why Part 2

It's easier than you might think to generate helpful online reviews. New Activated Insights research found that customers with even mildly upbeat perceptions of their senior living complex are generally willing to give positive reviews.

In a study of nearly 7,000 residents and family members, respondents rated their complex on a scale of 1-5, where 3 is "good," 4 is "very good" and 5 is "excellent." The bulk of customers—more than 5,000 of them—gave ratings of 4 or 5. In a separate, open-ended question, more than 94% of those folks wrote positive testimonials. Even those giving ratings of 3 tended to give encouraging testimonials. 84% of those "3"s gave overall positive reviews.

Ratings of 3 and Above Generally Lead to Positive Testimonials



94%

of 4 or 5 ratings left a positive testimonial



84%

of 3 ratings left a positive testimonial



The takeaway: your organization likely has many customers ready to give glowing reviews. Why not take advantage of that goodwill? And don't be paralyzed by the possibility of negative reviews. A few negative comments can help build credibility in the minds of readers.

The How

There are multiple promising strategies to prompt customers to provide online reviews. For instance, some providers have a standard operating procedure to ask people who give them positive feedback verbally if they'd be willing to share that experience in a review on Google or elsewhere. Have a flier ready to hand out with an explanation of how people can leave an online review. (Such instructions can be found in a Google search.) Another tactic is adding a section to your staff email signatures that request Google reviews.



There also are ways to automate the process. Residents and family surveys from Activated Insights, for example, can be configured to ask respondents for permission to post testimonials on Google, and then to automatically publish those reviews.

One 36-community provider saw a 7x jump in the number of reviews during the two weeks of their Activated Insights resident and family survey compared to the whole month before their survey.

7x



The What

A few practical considerations when soliciting and benefiting from online customer reviews:



Motivate customers to post a review by noting it will help others find the right senior living community.



Encourage customers to mention a few specifics in the review. These could be features of the community or stories of a positive experience.



Make sure you have a designated team who is responsible for responding to negative reviews within a day. If the review violates the terms of use of a platform, challenge it. Otherwise, publish a respectful, humble response—showing your interest in feedback and continual improvement.



Promote positive reviews through your own social media channels to amplify their impact.

Spotlight on Leading Company: Brightview Senior Living

Brightview Senior Living, which owns and operates 45 senior living communities in eight states along the East Coast, is among the most sophisticated organizations in the use of online customer reviews. Brightview also ranked as the #1 Fortune Best Large Workplace in Senior Housing and Care in 2021.

We interviewed Julie Masiello, Senior Vice President of Technology and Marketing at Brightview, about her organization's approach to Internet ratings.



Julie Masiello

Senior Vice President of
Technology and Marketing

BRIGHTVIEW
SENIOR LIVING

Activated Insights: *How important are resident and family member online reviews to Brightview? Why?*

Julie Masiello: *Online reviews are an important tool for our residents and their family members as they are deciding which senior living community is right for them. Amazon and other online companies have taught consumers to “look for the stars,” which means that even though we don’t personally know the people who leave reviews, we have all developed an innate trust in the feedback they have provided. Although you can’t buy senior living online, consumers research senior living online using the same methodologies that they would for any other important purchase.*



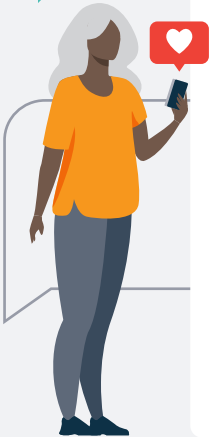
What impacts have you seen from online reviews? Can you tell a story about a particular review that had an impact on Brightview?



We've seen a tremendous shift in the amount of research that prospective families are completing online before their first visit to Brightview, and that is exciting to us. Online reviews are “social proof” of the quality of our care and the vibrancy of the lifestyle that residents enjoy at Brightview. Once families do visit Brightview, what they see is confirmation of what they learned about us online. That has caused the length of the sales cycle to shorten substantially versus where it was even 5 years ago.

We've seen the power of reviews show up in our reviews! Adult children will often share in their reviews how they first decided to visit Brightview because of the overall tone of the reviews they read before they picked up the phone and talked to a salesperson. These days families are often scattered geographically, so it is hard for them to truly understand the “on the ground” reputation of senior living communities in the area where they want their parents to live. We had one adult child from California tell us that she researched 20 communities in New Jersey, and our online reviews helped her to narrow down her search to visit just two communities when she flew across the country to visit. Even the best advertising slogans or videos can't compete with the power of strong reviews.

What strategies do you use to encourage residents and family members to generate and post reviews?



Garnering positive reviews requires the same skill set that it takes to be a good operator—namely, when you have a strong relationship with your residents and their families, and you are providing an exceptional experience for your residents, it is easier to ask for an online review. We often have families provide us with positive verbal feedback, and that is a perfect time to ask for an online review. Detailed reviews that describe exactly what we did well are worth their weight in gold, and our families are happy to provide those reviews when you ask them when they are “in the moment” of providing that feedback. One of our newer communities received 103 very detailed Google reviews from residents and family members just last month! That's the power of connection with your residents, which is something that every director in our communities aims to achieve regardless of whether it results in a review.

Reviews don't happen by chance; operators must have a strategy for asking for the review or they likely won't happen very often. It is just human nature to think about leaving an online review more often when you are dissatisfied with a service than when you are happy with a company.

Where do you encourage people to post reviews? What sites or services?



We are happy to receive reviews on any platform, but we value Google reviews the most. Most people start their research by searching on Google, and the business panel on the right side of the search results shows the star rating and a link to the reviews that a company has achieved only on the Google platform. It sets the tone for the quality of the community at the very beginning of their online research.

ⁱ BrightLocal reports, “Local Consumer Review Survey 2020” and “Local Consumer Review Survey 2018.”

ⁱⁱ Christopher Cheney, “70% of Patients Call Online Reviews Crucial in Selecting Healthcare Providers,” HealthLeaders, April 29, 2019.

ⁱⁱⁱ Denise Graab, “Senior Care Reviews: How to Build Your Online Reputation & Be a Star,” June 20, 2019.



Dr. Jacquelyn Kung is chief executive of Activated Insights, a technology and data firm in senior care; a Fellow at Nexus Insights; and a Board member of Eskaton.

Julie Masiello is Senior Vice President of Technology and Marketing at Brightview Senior Living.

