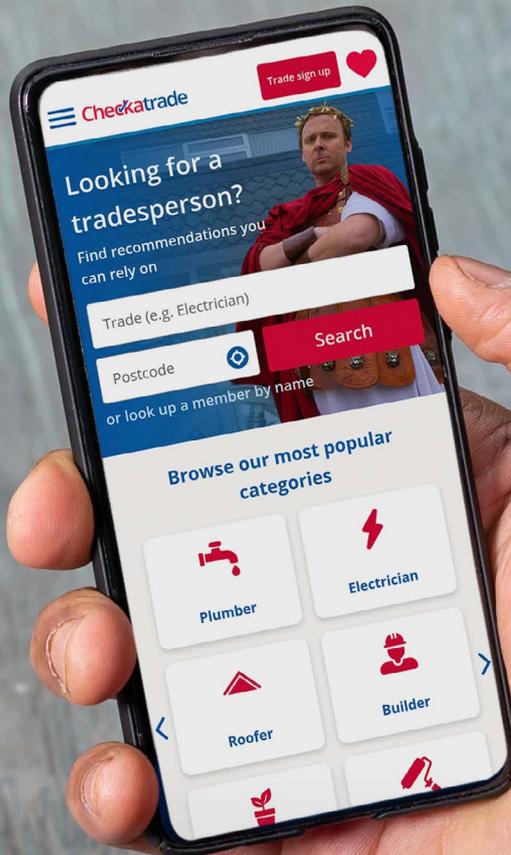


Checkatrade

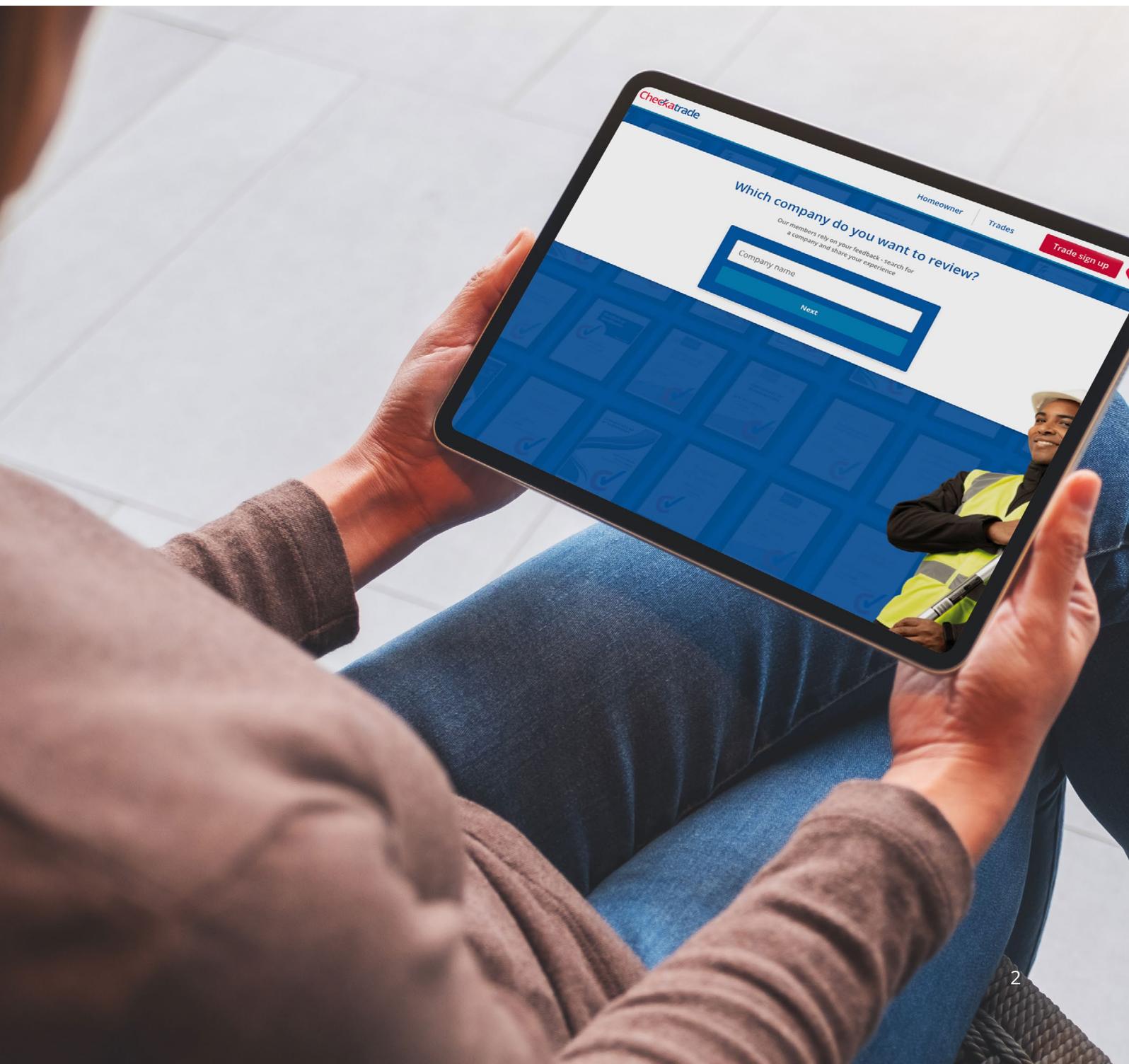


REVIEWS IN REVIEW

Why we review what we do:
your one-stop review etiquette guide

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Mike Fairman, CEO Checktrade

Introduction

Understanding the Art of a Useful Online Review

It's now easier than ever to leave a review after experiencing a service, with many companies asking for feedback no matter how big or small the experience.

Yet are we leaving reviews? Our research reveals that 17% of Brits don't leave reviews after experiencing a product or service, with 22% not considering the impact their words could have on a business. Reviews not only have the power to inform customers but can also instil trust and build success for companies. In fact, reviews are very much at the heart of our business, where tradespeople and companies of different sizes rely on positive feedback to build reputation and secure their livelihoods.

Checktrade understands the value of customer reviews more than most. Since our inception in 1998, we've actively encouraged trades and their customers to collect and give reviews, and we independently verify every single one. To date, over 5 million people have left reviews for our tradespeople.

With our long-term love of recommendation, we wanted to explore the nation's behaviours around leaving online reviews in more detail, and with 65% of people keen to understand how to leave a constructive and fair online review, we've teamed up with etiquette expert, William Hanson to help.

We hope you find these tips helpful and remember – online reviews help both prospective customers and small businesses. Keep posting your recommendations, and businesses will keep learning and growing to better suit your needs.

Mike Fairman, CEO, Checktrade

About the Guide

This guide is brought to you by Checktrade and the UK's leading expert in etiquette and protocol, William Hanson. It is designed to help you feel confident that the next time you leave an online review you're helping support small businesses and the people which use them.

The Etiquette Expert's Take

There is an etiquette for everything in life, and online testimonials and reviews are no exception.

It is marvellous for consumers to have a plethora of review sites available at their fingertips. They enable us to check if that hotel bedroom really is as quiet as the hotel's marketing says it is, or if the plumber we're about to hire will turn up on time or keep us waiting.

Users of these sites must credit the good as well as flagging the bad for them to be useful for both other consumers and businesses themselves. Information and knowledge are power, but we must use it properly and courteously if it is to be effective.

I am delighted to be able to work with Checkatrade to make sure we can finesse and hone our reviews for products and services. Sometimes it can be daunting sitting down to type a reference when we aren't sure what to say or where to start. Producing this guide has been great fun and I hope everyone finds it useful.

William Hanson, etiquette expert



William Hanson, etiquette expert



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We have become more educated on the importance of reviews and recommendations, largely thanks to having review sites like Checkatrade in our lives for some years now. Although some people may only use review sites to gripe and groan, thankfully more and more are using reviews for good, and tastefully shouting about good craftsmanship and services.

William Hanson, etiquette expert

The Changing Face of Reviews

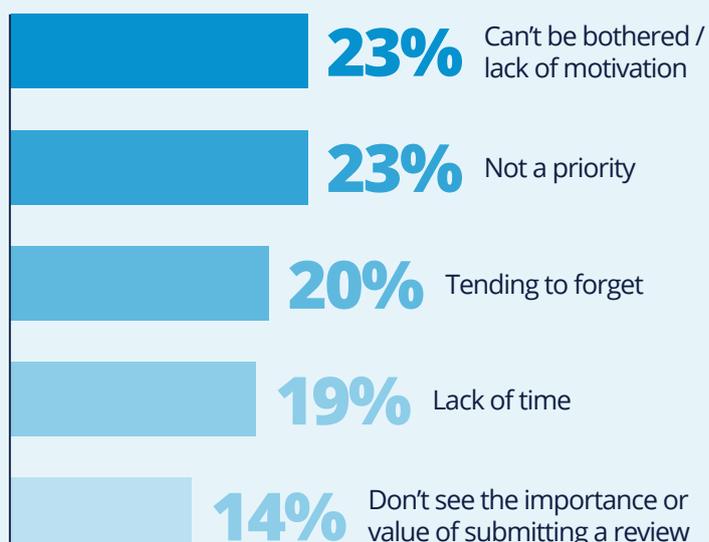
Long gone are the days where the only way to understand the quality of a product or service was to ask a friend. Luckily, now we have access to billions of other customers' reviews at our fingertips – whether online or on social media. Checktrade alone has 5.6 million customer reviews, all of which have been independently verified and checked.

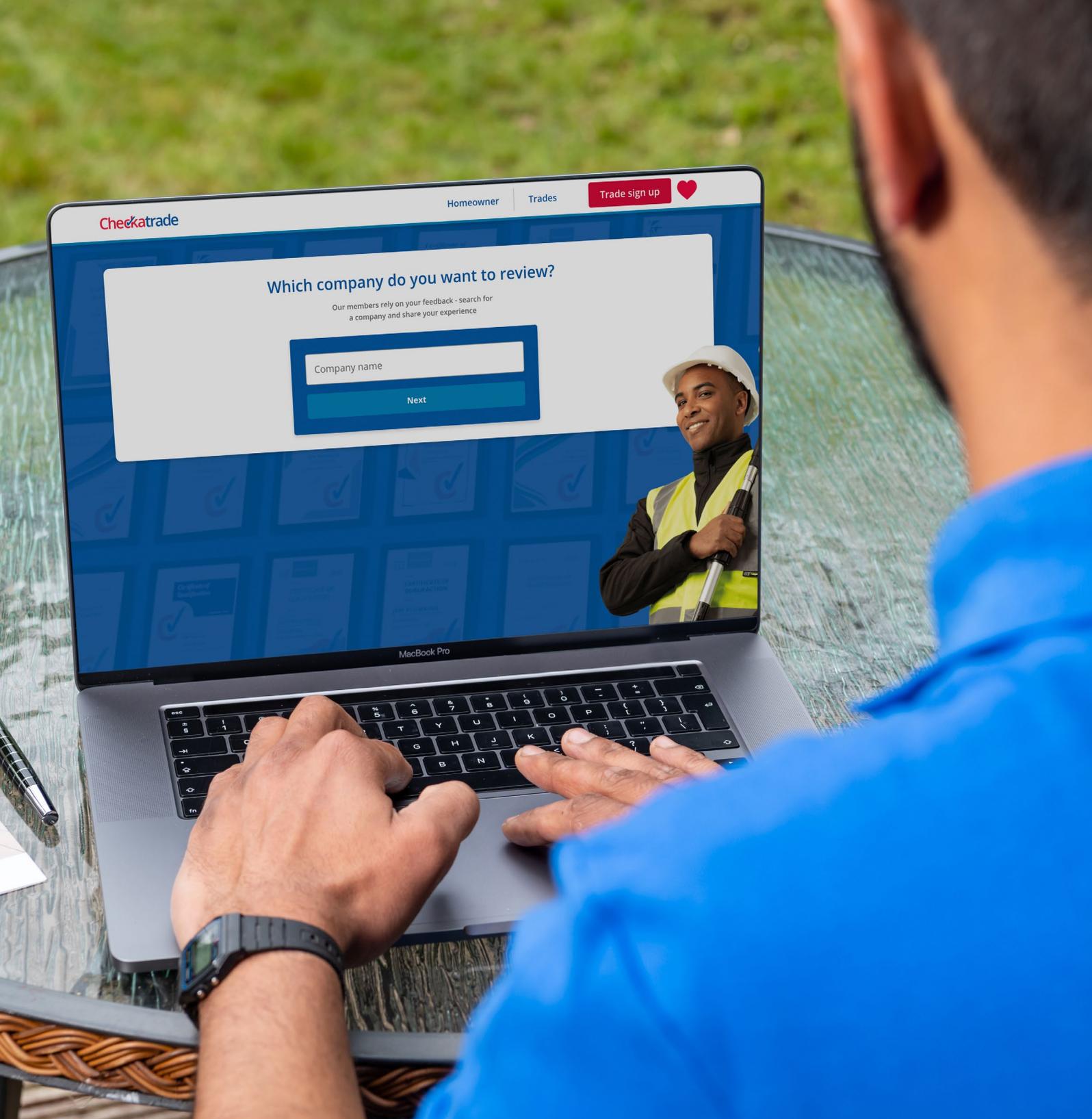
Yet, despite the number of online reviews available to view with just one click, new research from Checktrade* reveals that 17% of people never leave an online review after experiencing a product or service. This is despite a huge 90% saying they rely on reading reviews to help them make a purchasing decision.

Coupled with the fact that 65% of those polled said they'd be interested in a guide on how to provide a constructive and fair review, it seems people need help when it comes to understanding the art of leaving an online review – which is where this guide comes in.



The most popular reasons for not leaving a review at all are:





Reviews are becoming increasingly important. 48% of those polled called out reviews as the biggest influence in their decision to use a product or service – though value for money comes top (62%) – and 46% say they would never choose to use a product or service without reading the online reviews beforehand.

Furthermore, our survey respondents said they read an average of seven reviews before deciding whether to book a hotel, six reviews for a tradesperson and only four reviews for hairdressers/barbers. Almost one fifth (18%) of people polled claim not to read any reviews before booking in a tradesperson, with 17% not reading any reviews before booking a restaurant and even fewer – 13% – not reading any hotel reviews before booking one.

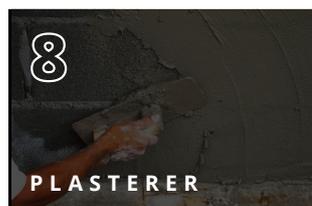
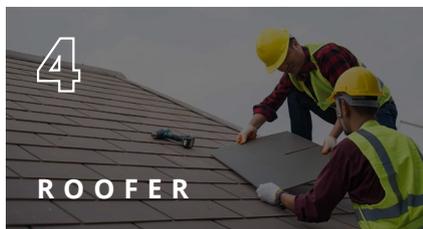
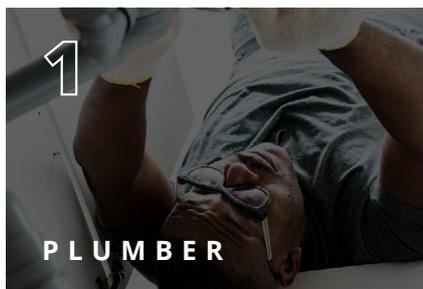
However, the average person leaves only 4 online reviews a month, showing a disconnect between the nation's behaviour when it comes to reading and writing reviews – with those from London the most diligent (leaving 7 reviews on average a month) and respondents from the South West the least likely to write one (leaving only 2 reviews on average a month).

Why Leave a Review?

Before going on to understand how exactly to craft a useful review, it's important to recognise the potential impact of both positive and negative reviews on other consumers and businesses. In fact, 22% admit they don't think about the potential impact their review – whether positive or negative – can have on a business.

A fair and honest review can provide important insights and recommendations for other people. Businesses can also be boosted by positive reviews which build trust and gain them more potential customers while, constructive criticism can help them learn and improve.

Looking at a sample** of Checkatrade's 5 million+ customer reviews, the most-reviewed category is plumbers followed by electricians. The most common adjectives used in Checkatrade reviews for both categories were 'professional' followed by 'excellent'.



The Etiquette of Leaving an Online Review

There's no escaping that online reviews are everywhere, with industries from hotels to hairdressers, from taxi services to builders asking consumers for reviews. Perhaps this could account for why 17% of people told us they choose not to leave a review. Although some people are more likely to share their woes – 66% admit to leaving a negative review with a further one in ten (11%) opting to leave a negative review over a positive one.

Those polled who have ever left a negative review say being able to complain about their poor experience (62%), to help other people make better buying decisions (52%) and to warn others not to use the business (43%) top the reasons behind the negativity.

Interestingly, a quarter (25%) of people who left a bad review claimed they regretted it later. This suggests the importance of following the review etiquette set out in this guide to avoid getting review regret after rushing to leave a review – especially as one fifth (19%) of people pay more attention to negative online reviews than positive ones.



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When so much online can be negative, it is always a good idea to counter this by promoting and highlighting things that are good. Service review sites must be for both the good and the bad and thankfully, as the technology becomes less of a novelty and more familiar to many, we have become a lot better at making sure we give positive feedback as well as constructive criticism

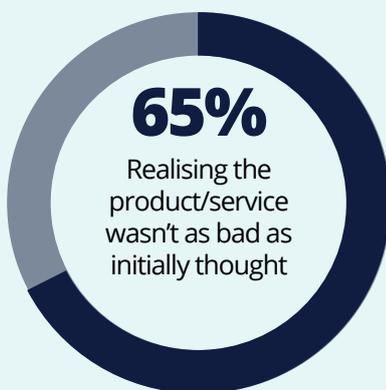
William Hanson, etiquette expert

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When analysing bad reviews, it's a good idea to check how much of the review is about the person in general rather than the service provided. Although it is critical that we allow nice, pleasant and respectful people into our houses, if a review spends more time ripping into the person than it does their service, this usually flags the reviewer is on an unfortunate vendetta.

William Hanson, etiquette expert

The top reasons for regretting leaving a poor negative are below, suggesting the importance of taking a step back and thinking through the experience before leaving a review:



On the other hand, of those who have never left a negative review, one fifth (19%) say this is because they have never had a bad experience, while 18% claim to have felt too awkward to leave a bad review.

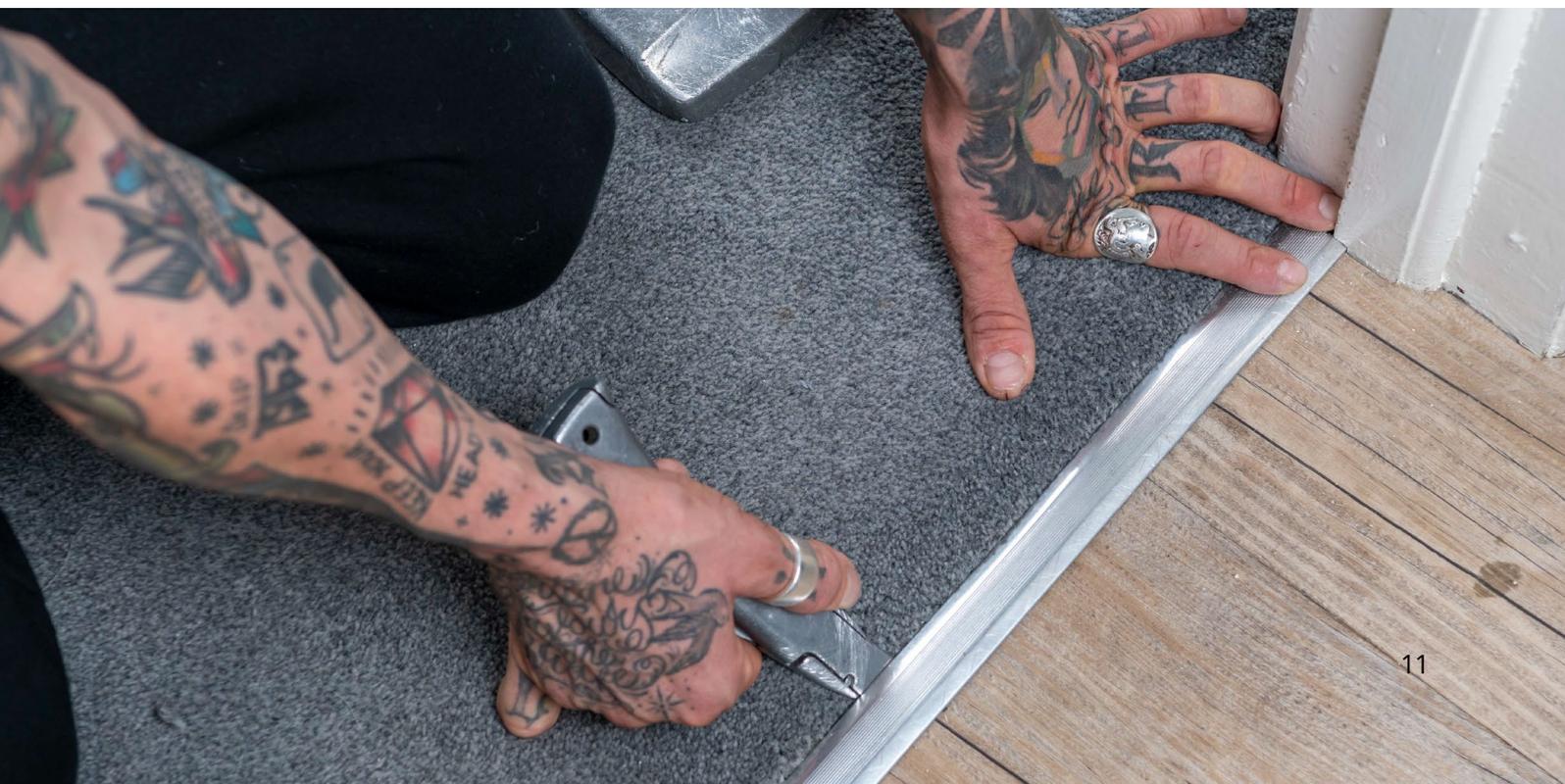
William Hanson's Do's and Don'ts

DO:

- ✓ Outline the brief or reason for hiring the service provider
 - ✓ Add specific examples to back up your points
 - ✓ Think of helpful elements that really elevated your experience and highlight them
 - ✓ Step back before you leave a review to allow some perspective – but make sure to do it in a timely manner
 - ✓ Give context or background information – explain the time frame and why you were using the service or experience
 - ✓ Remember to compare the service you received to what you paid/signed up for without expecting anything more or less
 - ✓ If a rating system isn't available, rate your experience out of 10
-

DO:

- ✗ Don't be too vague or general – just saying 'the service was good' or 'the service was bad' is not enough – you need to explain why
- ✗ Don't be someone who only leaves bad reviews and doesn't commend the good
- ✗ Don't rush when writing your review – make sure you've included information that will be helpful to other consumers and the business itself
- ✗ Don't make it personal and attack the service provider on anything other than their work and ability



The 7 Steps To Review Excellence

The top elements that people look for in reviews are quality of service (54%), reliability (47%) and value for money (46%).

If you truly want your review to stand out, William Hanson believes there are seven key elements to include. These are all designed to really elevate your review above the rest and ensure they are helpful for fellow and potential customers, as well as the businesses themselves – so everyone wins.



1. Share Anecdotes

Bring a bit of colour to your review to really paint a picture – rather than keeping it to a simple ‘XX service was good, I’d recommend them’, share an anecdote to illustrate why. Did your plumber fix your issue even quicker than expected? Did your roofer do a great job and even go above and beyond with what you expected? When people are looking to use a service, they often want real examples of why the service was good or bad – it helps people visualise what their experience might be like.



2. Pace Yourself

Don’t write a review straight away while you’re in the moment. Make sure you’re definitely happy (or unhappy) with the service before you pen a review as your feelings may change once you’ve had a bit of time to think about it. Then don’t forget to leave the review within one week so you still remember all the little details that will really make it a helpful review for others.



3. Add Context

When leaving a review, give a brief summary of the reason for using the brand or service. For example, “I booked Matthew to build and fit some new custom bookcases in the study.” Or, “My family and I had heard about this hotel from our friends a few years ago so decided we’d book a week’s stay during half-term.” Then mention as many good points as possible, before any areas you feel they may need to address. If possible and fair, end on a positive.



4. The Fairness Test

Before leaving a review, always ask yourself ‘is this fair?’ and ‘were my expectations realistic?’ Your handyman is not a babysitter, and neither are they a concierge. If they did sign for a parcel for you while you were out, great – that’s really kind of them and this should be mentioned in the review as an added courtesy and a way of them going above and beyond. But if they missed the postman one day and you had to hunt down the depot to get the parcel then this is not something you can gripe about (in the review or to your friends!). And if something has gone wrong – either at the hairdresser’s or with the cleaner, or whatever service you’re using – make sure you approach them first and give them the chance to correct it before you take to online reviews (or social media) to vent.



5. Clear and Ongoing Communication

Never leave something negative in a review you didn’t tell the service provider directly. Did you think the towels in the bathroom smelled? That’s fine, but you need to let the hotel know and allow them to address that before you take to a review site to berate them. If you’re unhappy with any element of a service/job/experience, ensure you work with the company or person to iron any niggles out as soon as possible rather than waiting until the job/experience is complete – you can then even reference how your challenge was addressed/ worked through as part of your review.

6. Don't Make It Personal ...



Try to avoid being personal on public review sites. Did your hairdresser smell? Unfortunate, but there is nothing good to come of humiliating them online about this. Was there a particular waiter in the restaurant who was rude to you? Mention the incident but avoid naming names. If the hotel manager needs to know they can reach out to you, and you can give the name privately.



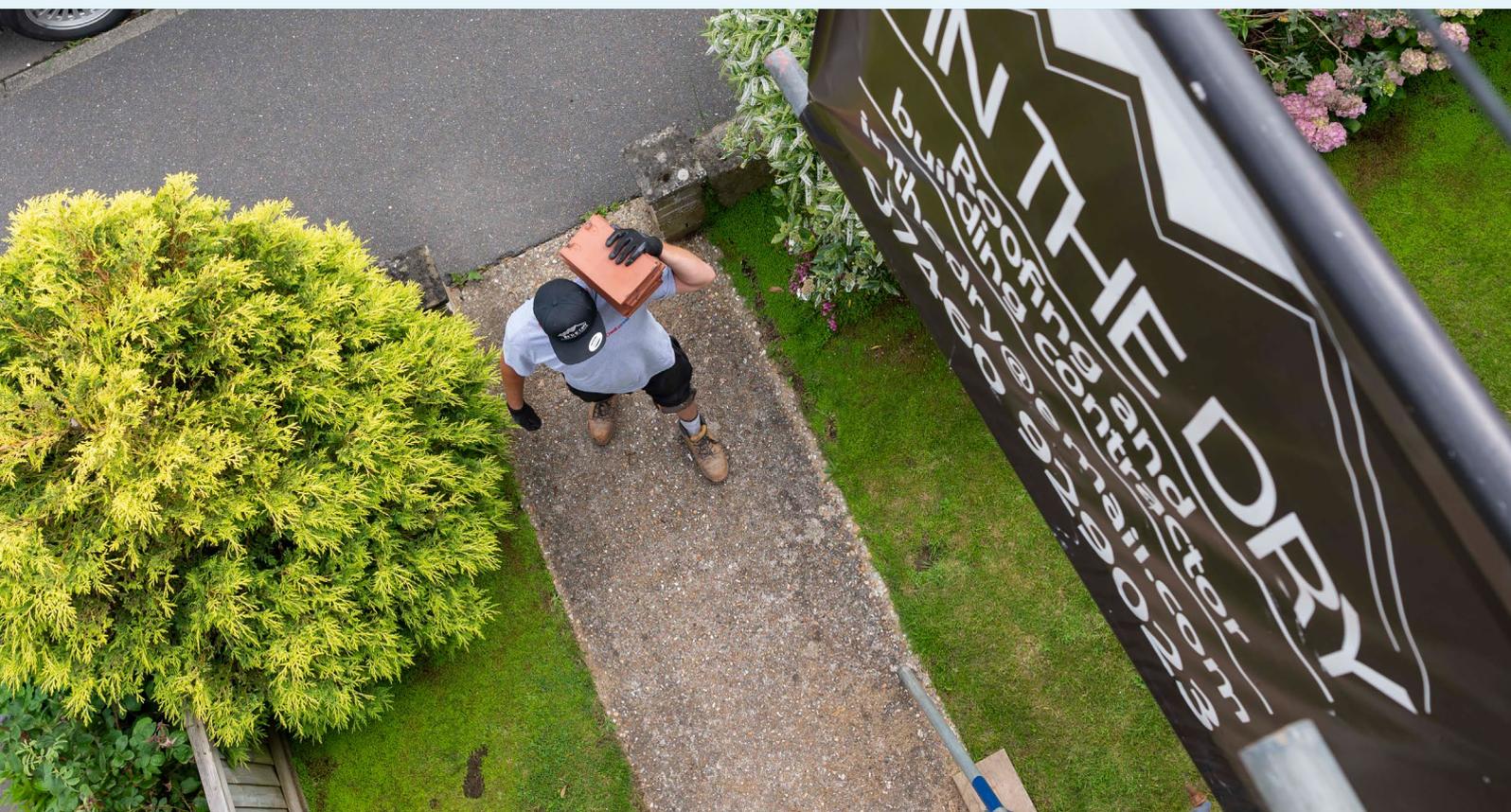
7. ... But Do Personalise

Use your review to point out any pleasing idiosyncrasies the service provider had. Did they love listening to a particular section of Mozart's Requiem as they plaster-boarded your hallway? Did they produce a lovingly prepared homemade quiche for their lunch each day? Did they insist they vacuumed any dust and chippings before leaving? All of these personal touches are often difficult for service providers to claim themselves without being verified by human experience, take the time to tailor the review to the service provider to cut through the noise of competitors.

BONUS: Above and Beyond

If service / person went above and beyond, tell them. For example, if your plasterer dusted down after completing the job or your electrician helped you set up your TV once they've installed it make sure to mention these acts of generosity in your review. But also remember what you have paid for and make sure it's a fair reflection of the service you chose (whether dog grooming or landscape gardening) rather than being grumpy they didn't do something outside of their scope (like a carpenter putting up a TV after fixing up your cabinetry) or otherwise throw in any extras while they were there.

And finally, remember some sites like Checkatrade will go above and beyond to verify if reviews are left by real people to reduce the chance of fake reviews. It can be a comfort to know you're basing your decision on the experiences of real people, and Checkatrade's checks ensure their consumer recommendations are ones you can rely on.



A man with a beard, wearing a blue polo shirt, is looking down at a potted plant. The background is a grassy area. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box.

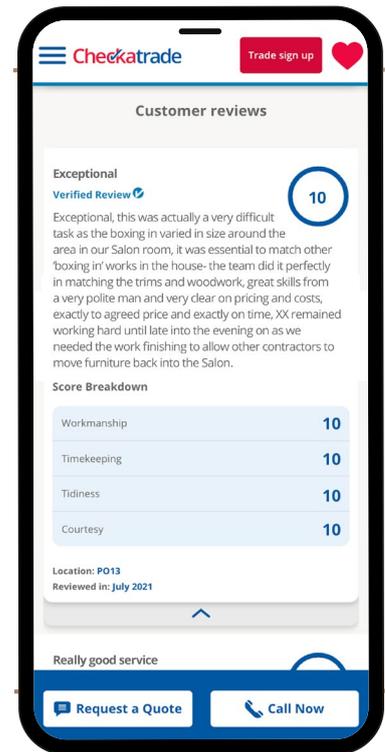
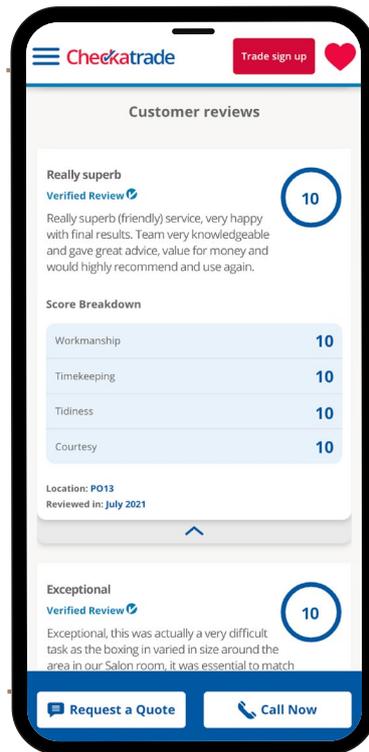
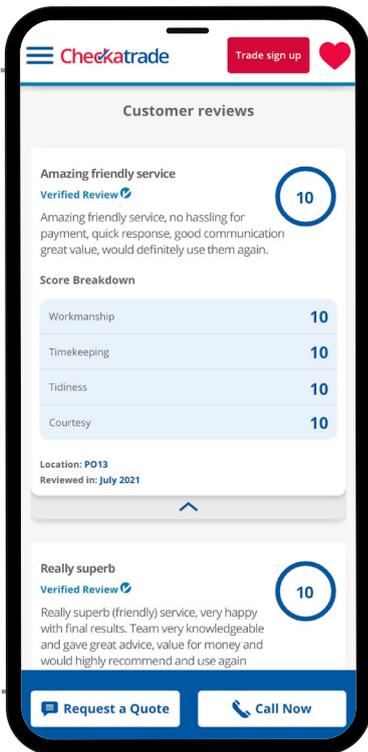
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When leaving a review (good or bad), remember you are not leaving the next Booker Prize entry. You don't need to deliver perfect prose. Start by explaining why you hired the service provider and what the brief was - give some context.

For example: 'The electrician was honest and mindful that we did not have a big budget. She pointed out the socket needed replacing too, but it would be cheaper if I bought the socket from a website, she recommended rather than her buying it where she would have to add on a service fee. We did and she came back the week later to install it when she was already in our area, and she didn't charge.' Always back up your points with evidence from the service or visit.

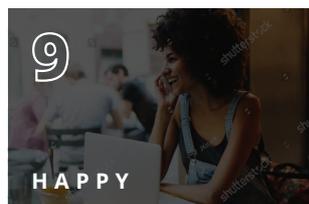
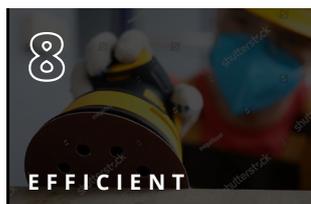
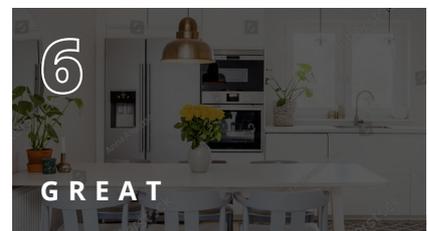
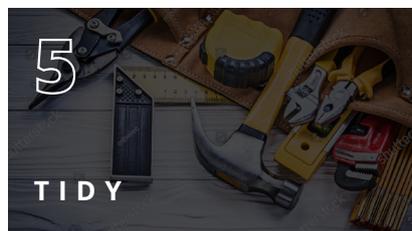
William Hanson, etiquette expert

Example Useful Reviews



Top 10 Most Popular Adjectives Used in Checkatrade Reviews**

With 41% of people keen to find out useful words to use in a review, Checkatrade has revealed the top 10 most popular adjectives used in their reviews:





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Once you have drafted your review, you can always show it to a friend or relative to see if they think it's fair or if you are being too harsh. This is especially important for negative reviews. Sometimes some gentle questioning from a loved one can make us tone down or explain in better, less emotional, detail what happened and why.

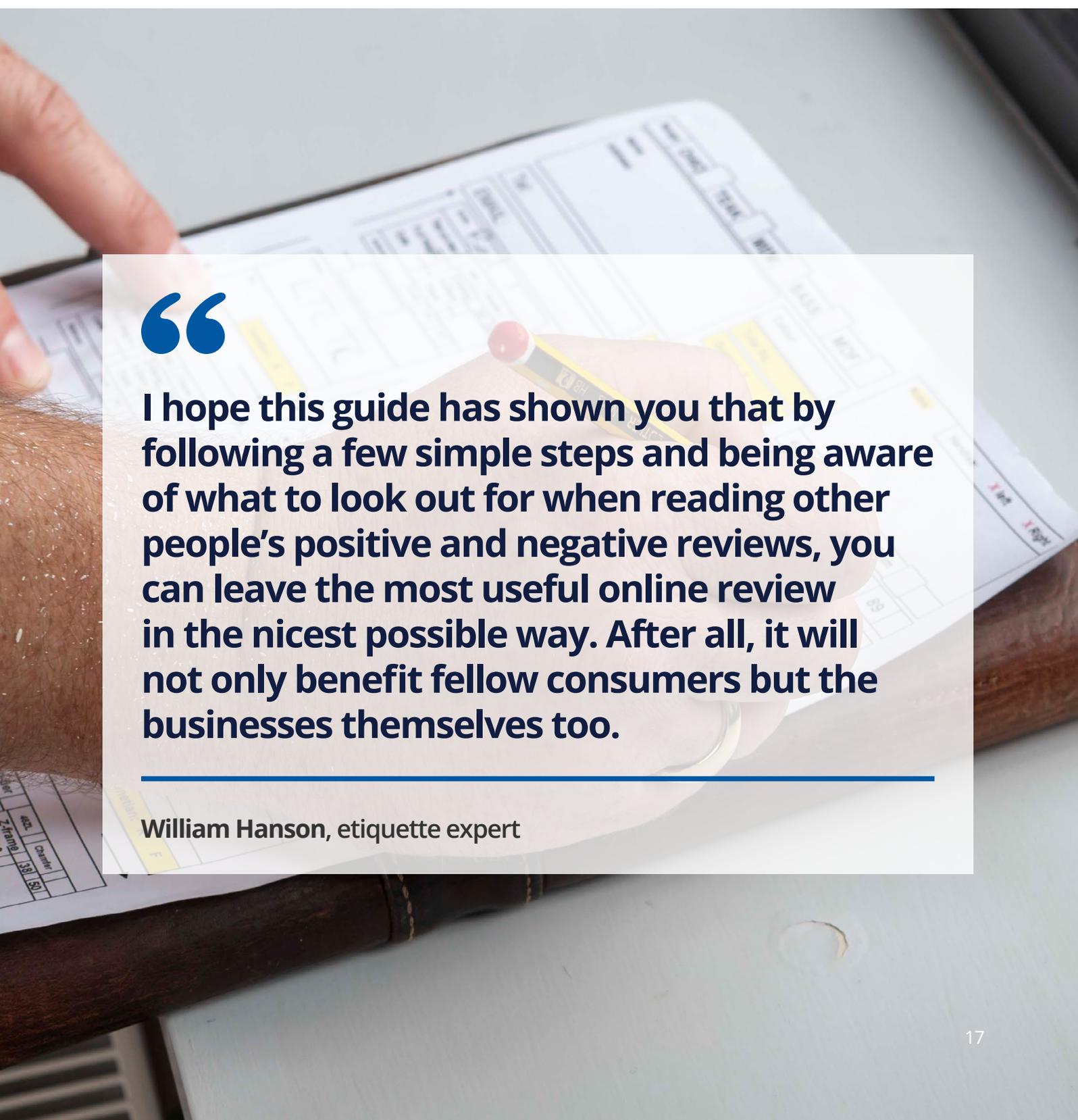
William Hanson, etiquette expert

A Final Word

In our modern-day era of online reviews, the opportunity to share our thoughts and recommendations with the whole world is one that should be valued. We all have an opportunity to leave fair, honest and constructive feedback which could make a profound difference to a small business.

Whether you are more likely to leave bad reviews than good (11%) or have never left an online review before (17%), we hope this guide will help you think about the purpose of reviews, good or bad, and ensure they are useful to both the service provider and the customers that will come after you.

When it comes to leaving an online review, it's worth investing a little bit of time to ensure your fellow consumers – as well as businesses – are getting the most impact from the words you share.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand pointing at a document with a red pen. The document appears to be a form or a checklist with various fields and text. The background is slightly blurred, showing a desk and a chair.

“

I hope this guide has shown you that by following a few simple steps and being aware of what to look out for when reading other people's positive and negative reviews, you can leave the most useful online review in the nicest possible way. After all, it will not only benefit fellow consumers but the businesses themselves too.

William Hanson, etiquette expert

Experts

William Hanson is widely regarded as the UK's freshest and most trusted authority on etiquette and civility. William provides first-class accredited training and is a trusted advisor to many private households, embassies and high commissions, businesses, cultural organisations and schools alike, and has worked for numerous dignitaries. He is the author of the bestselling, irreverent and indispensable manual of modern-day social climbing, *The Bluffer's Guide to Etiquette* and *The Bluffer's Guide to Entertaining*.

Methodology

***Consumer Research**

2,000 British adults were surveyed online between 13th-16th July 2021 by OnePoll on behalf of Checkatrade.

****Checkatrade Internal Data**

Based on a sample of 1,010 Checkatrade reviews.

Checkatrade