

OwnerListens: *Feedback is a Gift*

Feedback is a gift

Whether or not you agree with the old adage “*The customer is always right*”, it is clear that honest customer opinions make way for tremendous improvements on all fronts, with every customer having different astute observations and views on a business. As critical as some business owners may be on themselves, the value of varied customer perspectives is unmatched.

Feedback is a necessity

With online communications outlets more accessible than ever, business owners ignore customer opinions at their own peril. Not only will they miss important insights about their business, those customer opinions may end up public and hurt the business’ reputation. A 2011 study conducted by Harvard Business School Professor Michael Luca, stated that one Yelp star addition to the total review score of a business can translate to a 5-9% increase in revenue.

Feedback is hard to come by

Society has always had its rules on etiquette and its restrictions on common courtesy. People are conditioned not to insult others, to avoid saying anything negative and have a natural inclination to want to make others happy. People *do* want to speak their mind and be heard, but they are taught to hold back.

A Common Scenario:

“How was your dessert?”, asks a waiter.

“Oh... it was.... good...” , the customer chokes out. The waiter can obviously read the customers face: the panicked eyes, the over eager smile.

The poor, awkward waiter now comes into a terrific dilemma: should she badger the insulting truth out of her overall well-meaning customer, or go on knowing something is wrong with the food that the kitchen will continue to make, resulting in the loss of valuable customers? Maybe she should bring the manager over.... and make a scene? Never mind.... It’s not worth it....

The waiter knows something is wrong but will never know what it was exactly. Was there a mistake made in the kitchen? Was the entree not served hot enough? Was there a hair in the dessert that caused it to lay half eaten. The moment is lost, the customer will likely never return. The next day, the owner will awake to find a negative Tweet/ Facebook post or a bad public review on Yelp/Tripadvisor and lose even more customers.

To err is human

The fact is that businesses do *occasionally* make mistakes, employees have off days, or machines break down. Businesses need raw feedback in order to reflect on those errors, learn from them, and make amends when appropriate. The time has come to let consumers point out errors, to voice these thoughts, and to help everyone prosper. However, there is no need for that “dirty laundry” to be aired out in public. If only customers could give business owners feedback without making it public...

Introducing OwnerListens

The intersection of customer feedback, customer service, and business operations is exactly where OwnerListens comes in: OwnerListens is a (*free!*) mobile app with which consumers can spill their hearts desire of suggestions, anonymously, easily, privately, to any business. It is conflict avoidance and real-time service at its best and most productive.

Our Story

OwnerListens was co-founded by a restaurant owner, Oren Dobronsky, who found himself struggling to get authentic feedback from customers even when he asked. After he launched OwnerListens at his restaurant, the number of and quality of input he received from customers quintupled; these inputs brought his attention to everything from high level customer requests to minute details and specific instances, such as the music being too loud on some nights, or condiments forgotten in a take out order.

Many issues have been details important to the customer that can be easily overlooked by such a busy restaurant.

OwnerListens worked so well, Oren felt compelled to share it with other business owners and formed a company with longtime friend, Adi Bittan, a Stanford MBA graduate passionate about local businesses and great customer service. Together they've been testing and improving OwnerListens for the past six months.

How it works

OwnerListens provides business owners with materials such as signs and stickers to let customers know of this better, more effective way to communicate. OwnerListens then sends those reactions *directly to the business owner* (we have our ways of tracking them down). These owners can then respond to the message through their phone or on our website. They can apologize, explain, and even compensate the customer when warranted. It's that easy, and it's free.



Case Study: Oren's Hummus Shop

In June 2011, Oren Dobronsky founded Oren's Hummus Shop, an extremely popular Israeli cuisine restaurant located in downtown Palo Alto, California. Due to the great food, fun environment, and wonderful location, Oren's was quickly overwhelmed with customers. Taking a leaf out of his experience as a technology entrepreneur, Oren knew that getting feedback from his initial customers was key to tweaking and improving the restaurant.



The Challenge of Soliciting Feedback

In the first few weeks of operations Oren would walk around the restaurant and ask people for their thoughts. Some people would respond honestly and elaborate but most people would just respond with “great” or better yet “awesome” (it is California after all) and get back to their meal. Fair enough. That is the main purpose of their visit. Authentic feedback was hard to come by.

The Challenge of Online Reviews

As the first weeks went by, Oren's Hummus began to see some online reviews pop up, especially on Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Foursquare. Most were great but some, not so much. The effects of the staff being overwhelmed was noticeable in some bad reviews and some customers were not excited about all the items on the - *still in testing mode* - menu. Oren also noticed that customers who walk by look up the place on their mobile phones, even before or without looking inside to check out the restaurant itself. The cardinal importance of online reputation was evident.

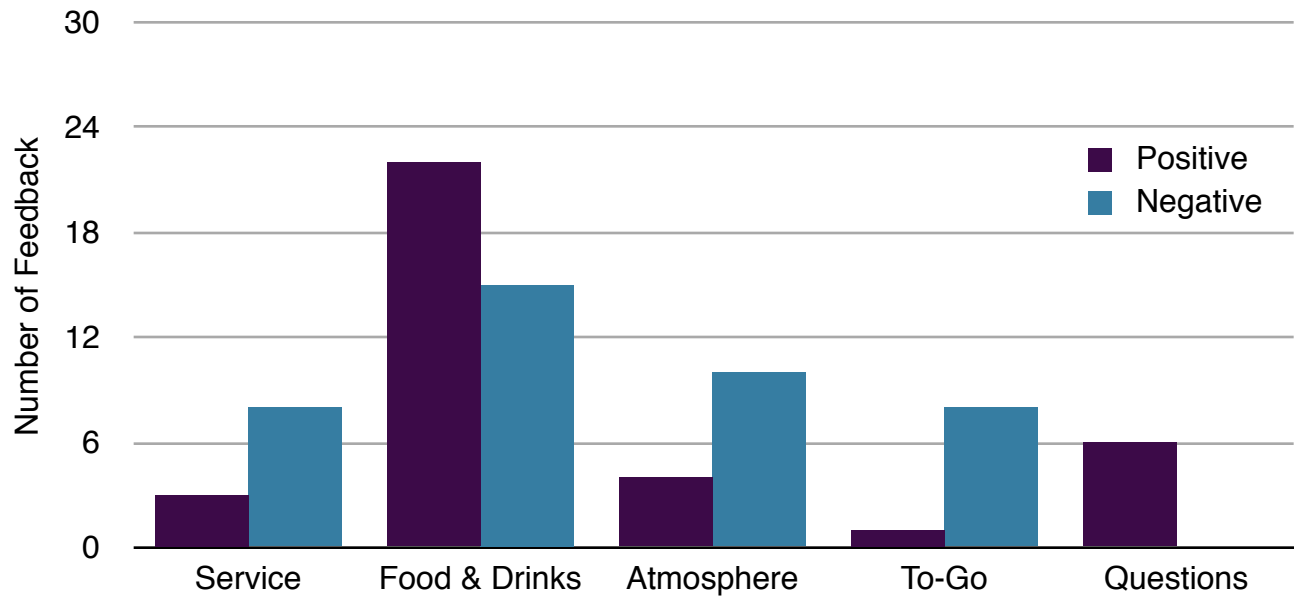


The OwnerListens Solution

After a few months of testing and prototyping, the OwnerListens application was ready to go. We first placed a sign on the hostess table in mid-January and then began asking customers for feedback when they received their check with the OwnerListens business cards.



Feedback at Oren's Hummus Shop



A rush of input followed: the first month the app was out, Oren's inbox amassed over 65 comments, suggestions, and compliments. There were some great ideas and suggestions, positive shout outs to good employees and inevitably complaints and gripes as well.

Upon analysis of his comments, Oren was able to see his strengths and weaknesses from different perspectives. This helped him prioritize what to work on and fix in order to achieve maximum customer satisfaction while identifying what was working well and should be emphasized even more. The insights applied to all aspects of the business: food, service, and operations.

Lessons Learned

Oren's Hummus Shop has greatly utilized the feedback they have received through OwnerListens.

Suggestions regarding the food, opening hours, and fixes to the takeout system have been implemented. For example, a suggested change in the way a duo of spicy sauces were served has led to an increase in appetizer orders and reduced waste.

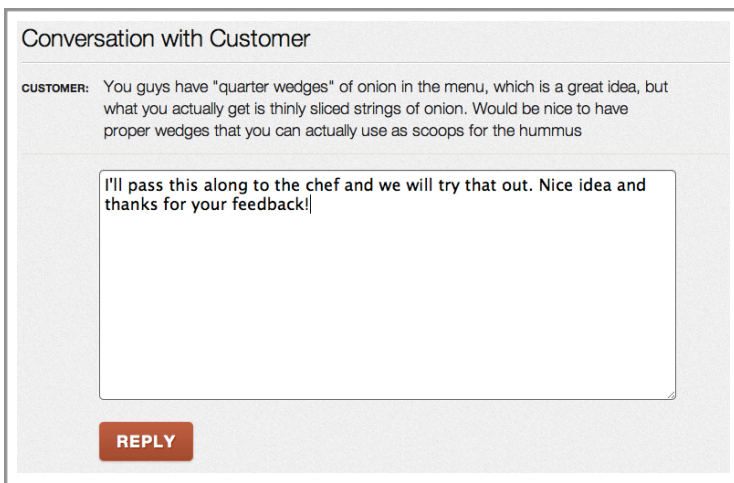
On the service side, waiters have been corrected and disciplined for negligent or rude service. With an employee, it is a much different conversation when a customer uses the OwnerListens app to provide a picture and detailed description of an instance, time-stamped so the owner knows exactly when a poor service incident occurred. The staff's overall compliance with restaurant policy and their willingness to go the extra mile have greatly improved with the app in place.

Customers who had a bad experience and complained have already redeem promised discounts to make up for bad service, and turned into loyal, repeat patrons. It is a documented fact that good service following a bad experience often engenders more loyalty than just having a good experience in the first place. Oren's experience confirms this.



Ongoing Learning

OwnerListens continues to operate at Oren's Hummus and he is continuing to receive valuable feedback on an ongoing basis, on average 3-5 feedbacks a week. Since the app is location based, Oren knows that the feedback is coming from real customers and during which shift they came in.



As he gets more accustomed to the different types of feedback, Oren and his general manager are getting a good feel for the types of responses that satisfy customers and are more proficient in fixing things quickly. Their responsiveness strikes a chord with customers and they've begun to not only send complaints but also ask questions that, when addressed lead to additional business.

Results

At Oren's Hummus, customer satisfaction has greatly improved, employees are much more motivated and online ratings have shot up. Oren's Hummus Shop now boasts a fantastic 4-star rating on Yelp, 4.5-star rating on TripAdvisor, and 4.5-star rating on UrbanSpoon. Oren's Hummus continues to improve with every feedback and customer suggestion.

Oren's Hummus Shop general manager: "I'd say almost 90% of the messages we get [on OwnerListens] are complaints, which is good because then they don't get publicly posted and we deal with them ASAP."

Oren himself explains: "Our Yelp rating went up since beginning of use, [because] many negative feedbacks didn't end up there [on Yelp]. When customers are happy they want the world to know that they are happy, but when they didn't like something they would let us know on OwnerListens to in order to make it change."

Conclusion

It's pretty clear Oren's Hummus is getting tremendous value from using OwnerListens, both at the individual customer level and at the macro business level. So are his customers who have become accustomed to floating issues and problems and getting quick resolution. It's a win-win for all (except online review sites). At OwnerListens we believe every business should provide this level of service and every customer deserves this level of service. We are here to help you, the business owner, achieve this so sign up at www.ownerlistens.com or give us a call at 650-308-8054.

