**BUSINESS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**RICK MANSFIELD**

The British Museum in London is known for its priceless collection of rare antiquities representing all manner of life and culture dating back thousands of years. Within the collection is an incredible artifact. It is a tablet, carved in stone, believed to date back to 1750 B.C. Historians have cracked the code and have interpreted the symbols and this particular tablet has a very auspicious message. It is a clay tablet believed to have originated in ancient Babylon. It also bears the distinction to be the first type of communication of its kind.... it is a complaint from a customer, the copper merchant, to a supplier. **FOUR THOUSAND YEARS OLD.** Yes. Some complaints just won't go away. (**Wait for the laugh**). Whether or not Nanni, the copper merchant eventually settled and got the correct quality of ingots isn't that important right now. What is important, though, is that had Real People Reviews existed in ancient Babylon, there could have been the possibility of an equitable resolution for both parties.

Bill Gates has said, "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." Hello, I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and Real People Ratings was created because of the frustration we have personally encountered from being subjected to negative reviews in our former business. Merchants, suppliers, and other entities, and in particular small businesses, are the backbone of community life across this country. It doesn't matter the sector.... as long as there are two people negotiating or closing an exchange of goods or services, meals or merchandise, vulnerability and exposure to negative feedback and comment threatens the well being of every person involved. That is why I am here to speak with you today. I would like to thank you, (**Name the host**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inviting us/me here today to speak with all of you from (**Name the club or organization**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I appreciate the time you've taken from your businesses and livelihoods to see this presentation, listen to my thoughts, and think about what it would mean to you to have an authentic and convenient tool with which to counter balance negative reviews that lurk in the online atmosphere. Now granted, those reviews don't carry the actual physical weight of an ancient complaint scribed onto a clay tablet, but it is our mission to provide you with the strategy and wherewithal to diffuse potential problems before they threaten to wreak four thousand years.... or even several days worth of damage.

It's a known fact that small businesses are the heart and backbone of this country. According to an article in Forbes, in 2013, there were almost 28 million small businesses throughout the country and over 22 million people are self employed with no additional payroll. As the article points out, small businesses are considered to be those with fewer than 500 employees.... that's means A LOT of entities fall into this category! Over 50% of the working population are categorized into this group and back in 2013, almost 543,000 new businesses got started each month.... of course simultaneously, others close down. Keep in mind that this data goes back to 2013. Since then the trend has been towards decentralization of employment and more and more people fall into the category of non-employers, independent contractors, and micro-entities. As small business owners, I don't have to tell you how many hats you might wear during the day. The companies you've founded, funded, and staffed must work incredibly long and hard to meet the demands of the contemporary marketplace. In turn, potential customers and clients can also be stretched to their limits from demanding jobs and increasing responsibilities. Sometimes, no matter how we do whatever possible to serve and retain patrons and their loyalty, incidents can happen that through misunderstanding and miscommunication, can escalate.... and sometimes complaints can even be baseless. As we know, in this new world in which we live, EVERYONE has a voice and everyone wants to be heard. Andy Warhol may have said, "In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes," but in the present day, that fifteen minutes.... that public outreach and outcry... that negative review can have a disastrous impact on your productivity and livelihood.... and its impact can last much longer than fifteen minutes.

Online reviews have become a big business category in their own right..... so much so, in fact, that they're garnering even more than their own fifteen minutes of fame.... the other day I was browsing through one of my Facebook feeds and found a video.... Jimmy Fallon has a regular segment on the Tonight Show in which he and his guests participate in sharing, "Dramatic Readings of Bad Yelp Reviews." Yes... no longer does a customer complaint just sit on a tablet for four thousand years, there's now the potential for negative reviews to circulate.... REALLY circulate. Each one of us are becoming increasingly connected and informed consumers. Every day that passes is a day in which the technology for connection advances and the public's awareness of the strength of their words and the options for expressing their dissatisfaction grows incrementally. What does this mean? Quite simply, it means we need to have a strategy and a technology to counter the damage done by negative online comments and campaigns.

Before we talk about what can be done to offset and resolve those negative reviews, I'd like to take a few minutes to get to know. YOU. By a show of hands, how many of you have had your business, product, or service reviewed on the Internet within the past twelve months? Okay... how many have **checked**? (**Wait for the laugh**). Did you check one website like Yelp or an appropriate related site? Have you also checked Facebook? Twitter? Have you Googled your business to see what you might possibly be missing? Don't worry, if you haven't done this yet, I have a feeling some of you will be pulling out your phones in....5.....4.....3....2.... (**Wait for the laugh**). We can joke about reviews in the confines of this meeting, but the truth is, it's a growing phenomenon and it's getting more popular and more pervasive every day. Think of the way YOUR shopping habits have changed over the past few years. Think about the research you do for what you buy personally and for your business. You have the opportunity to research and comb through limitless articles and opinions on anything and everything, and I'll bet that you do. After all... how did you decide on Apple vs. Android? IPhone 7 vs. 7 plus? S? SE? Ice cream sandwich? Kit Kat? Lollipop? Marshmallow? How and where do they GET these names?!?! It's maddening.... and this is just one small example to demonstrate just how bound we all are to online research and reviews.

Recent studies have shown that 92% of consumers reported reading online reviews. 68% stated that positive reviews provide them with more trust for local business, and between one and three bad online reviews was enough to keep the majority of those surveyed.... 67%, from purchasing a product or service from a business with negative feedback. Facebook is growing as a platform for reviews.... it's not just for DIY or puppy videos ... (**Wait for the laugh**)... Facebook has an average of over one billion users each day.... just think of how your personal friend list is growing and if you have a business page, recall how many visits, likes, and comments you get... and how that number is growing... and calling out problems on Facebook makes perfect sense... each one of us has our own "community." Word spreads geometrically... it's like the old Clairol commercial for the new millennium ... "I told two friends and she told two friends and so on..." for good and for bad. What are some other platforms you go to to check product and service reviews? (**Audience responds**). Wow... that's a lot of places and opportunity for comment!

Now, in your experience, just by a show of hands, have you found that reviews, both good and not so good, have impacted your business? If you want, may I suggest that you make some notes so that we can discuss more about this at a later time, perhaps during a one-on-one meeting.

I have a third question for you... how many of you have had a client or visitor post a negative or fake review of your business or service? If you don't want to raise your hand, I understand, but I want you to respond silently, and if you prefer, we can also discuss this type of situation at a later time. (**Do you want to have the audience declare their bad or fake reviews? We can work on this if you want- I'm concerned it might inhibit their participation**). We all take pride in the work we do and the services and goods we provide. Finding ourselves at the receiving end of a negative comment... or worse... isn't something we get over easily. And once the word is "out there," what can be done to remove it? Unfortunately, you probably have a greater chance of winning the lottery or getting struck by lightning than legitimately and permanently having a bad review removed from the ratings platform on which it was placed. And in the rare instance that we ARE able to have the bad review removed, it takes tenacity, energy, a lot of time that we just don't have, and a certain amount of aggressiveness to win that uphill battle. Online review platforms don't want to make it easy. They believe that he or she who controls the review controls the revenue.... **YOUR POTENTIAL REVENUE**. Most of us fall into two schools of thought when it comes to how we handle and process negative reviews. We either care or we don't. Either way, we relinquish control of the well-being of our business. If we care, it affects our performance and interactions. If the negative review was justified, that's a good thing. They're a wake up call and it causes us to pay more careful attention to the fundamentals of our communication, product, and effectiveness. If those reviews are **NOT** justified and we can't get rid of them, they haunt us and our future viability. We may search for remedies, but not even our trusted adviser, Google, can help us out of the mess. If we searched, we would probably find amateurs giving bad advice on how to bury negative reviews.... and that advice doesn't work. Why? Because even THIS is a revenue stream....online platforms encourage you to buy good reviews to bury bad ones. Did you every wonder where business strategies and income generators are shifting? ... time to look over here.... and it's time to be very careful... there are FTC regulations that state you must disclose your relationship to a reviewer and if anyone received any compensation or consideration for the "endorsement." Remember the words of Warren Buffet who said, "It takes years to build a reputation and minutes to ruin it."

... And then it can take a very long time to **rebuild** your reputation... if you have the strength and resources and determination to do that. Most of us would rather put that manpower and time into investing in our businesses and fortifying our assets instead of defending ourselves against negativity. .... I think you can see by now that I'm in the group that cares... and I've given this issue a lot of thought. The behemoth known as the online review community is growing exponentially. It is becoming a major revenue stream. Did you know that Yelp's income reached an astounding 713 million dollars in 2016 and they are expected to reach 1 BILLION DOLLARS by 2017?? Trip Advisor passed the 1.4 billion dollar mark in 2016. ... and that's just two entities. The ratings and reviews customer generated content sector is a MULTI- billion dollar industry. I would say that there is an imbalance between what you're doing, how you're being perceived in the public eye, and who is profiting.... in one way or another, off your collective customer experience. Research shows us that 88% of consumers refer to some degree to online reviews before making purchases both online and offline. 99% of consumers check online reviews if the purchase is more than one hundred dollars. Ask yourself.... are you going to shop for a major purchase before doing some research? We used to rely on publications like Consumer Reports, but now that almost everything is available at our finger tips, you can understand the proliferation of the online review community. I hope you're beginning to see the relevance of online reviews and how they can affect your business and bottom line positively and negatively.

Quality of reviews matters as well. You might want to jot this down. It has been shown that consumers will spend 31% more on a brand, product, or service if it has "excellent" reviews.. according to Harvard Magazine, even small increases in evaluations can influence incremental boosts by as much as 9%. When you look at those four star review ratings, don't you automatically look for the ones with four and a half to five stars? I know I do. And I know that I work hard for my money and I expect the best quality that I can afford for any and all goods and services that I purchase. I want to be informed, I bet **you** want to be informed, and I'll bet **even more** that your customers want to be informed and knowledgeable and will make sure they are heard if there are any problems, issues, or incidents involving products and services.

Here's something else to consider... according to a survey conducted by Bright Local, a company that tracks rankings, citations, analytics, and reviews, only 8% of consumers will visit a website... possibly **YOUR** website, after reading and considering reviews. It's been shown that consumers make quick, emotional, subconscious decisions... what does all of this mean? It means that you have a small window of consumer attention to make sure reviews reflect the quality and care you have invested into your brand, your business.... your **LIVELIHOOD**.

Even if you are a local business supplying your immediate community, it's essential to do whatever possible to insure that your online presence in every aspect, represent your product, your mission, and your intended impact on your clientele. And although some business owners might be tempted to shy away from more extensive online participation, who are we kidding? More and more business is predicated on Internet exposure and impact. No matter how much the consumer "window shops" before, during, and after making a purchase or using a service, the window has evolved from a brick and mortar display in a shop window to detailed product information....and reviews.... easily found in the comfort of one's own home, on his or her own computer screen.... and keep in mind that a lot more mileage and information can be covered virtually with some clicks and swipes.

I know I've shared a lot of information with you.... I know ideas, scenarios, information, and considerations have been offered. There is a light at the end of the review tunnel... what if it were possible to be proactive and to keep some of the control of the review process in your corner of the ball field? What if there was a place to which consumers... **YOUR** clients and customers would be guided.... a forum in which that playing field were more level... an arena in which your customers were able to voice their complaints, praises, assessments, disappointments, in an atmosphere devoted to resolution and satisfaction as opposed to a marketplace for anonymous or unproductive criticism?

RPR was founded in the deep roots of frustration. (**Wait for the laugh**). Trust us.... we know how deep those roots can go. We have "lived the dream" or should I say "nightmare" of attempting to survive and rectify negative reviews. The process is almost debilitating.... and while we fight the unseen behemoth of sites like Yelp and others whose algorithms thrive on inaccessibility and perpetuation of negativity, it has been our mission at RPR to be proactive, considerate, and constructive. We know that everyone will not love every service and product they research, but we believe in insuring that the product or service provider is able to partner with the consumer to address issues directly and to resolve them while fostering healthy vendor/client relationships.

There are features in the review process at Real People Reviews that allow for comment and also allow for authentication, discussion, resolution, and ultimately satisfaction. There are also safeguards that protect your business from "robo-reviews...." yes, as we advance as a civilization, our humanity is being co-opted by "others." Hey, I guess if Amazon and others can have drones deliver packages, some review sites think they can comment by "techno proxy!!" (**you can insert more specific terms if you feel the need, but perhaps most of the people in the audience will not be equally as savvy, so I would keep things understandable**). To paraphrase the great ancient Chinese warrior, Sun Tzu, "Know your adversary and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster." It's important in any business relationship to develop a proactive strategy.... it's essential to have a plan.

We have developed technologies and processes designed to allow the comments to be expressed, authenticate them, address whatever issues are mentioned, and provide a course for resolution and customer satisfaction. (**If you want to give a glimpse of some of the features, you can do that here**). With features like, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that allows the business owner to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we land on the right track to protect our professional and personal investments in our businesses. Let's face it.... we've all heard the expression, "The customer is always right." I will tell you that phrase was coined by Harry Gordon Selfridge in 1909. He was the founder of Selfridge's department store in London, and believe me, I'm pretty sure he had plenty of customers!! (**Wait for the laugh**). I'll bet he also had plenty of customer related issues and complaints as well, but every generation has to respond to their challenges in contemporary and effective ways. We are here to work with all of you to find those contemporary solutions to modern issues.

The truth is.... we are ALL consumers. We know how hard we work for the goods and services we buy and engage personally, so I know we can empathize with dissatisfaction. And no matter how sincerely we may not intend to be on the receiving end of criticism, the time has come to transform negative commentary into positive results for all involved. It's time to "know your adversary" and to work towards equitable solutions in order to preserve, sustain, and grow the businesses you've worked so hard to nurture. ... and while it's natural to have negative feedback, it's also important to be able to address that in terms that will build bridges rather than break trust.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to working with you in the future!