



IMPROVING ONLINE REVIEWS—QUICKLY AND CREDIBLY

A 30-Day Operating Playbook for Multifamily Owners and Property Managers

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THE HBS VIEW

Online reputation improves fastest when management fixes recurring service failures, asks every eligible resident at the right moment, and responds with speed and professionalism. The objective is not to manufacture praise — it is to make genuine resident satisfaction more visible.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A property's online rating is a trailing indicator of its operating experience. The quickest legitimate path to improvement is therefore a two-part program: remove the issues generating negative sentiment, then make it frictionless for a broad and representative group of residents to share honest feedback.

THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE

Do not try to “manage the score.” Manage the resident experience and the review-request process. The score follows.

In the first 30 days, a disciplined property can materially improve review velocity and the tone of its profile. The mathematical pace of rating improvement, however, depends on the property's starting rating, number of existing reviews, and the ratings of new reviews. A large review history will move more slowly than a small one.

THE FIVE PRACTICES THAT MOVE RESULTS FASTEST

1. **Stabilize the resident experience.** Identify the two or three recurring failures behind recent negative reviews—typically communication, maintenance completion, cleanliness, access, billing, or move-in readiness—and assign an accountable owner and service standard.
2. **Ask consistently, not selectively.** Invite a broad, policy-compliant group of residents to leave an honest review. Avoid “review gating,” in which only residents expected to be happy receive a public-review request.
3. **Request at high-trust moments.** The best moments are immediately after a verified maintenance resolution, a successful move-in check-in, a helpful office interaction, an event, or a renewal conversation.
4. **Remove friction.** Use one direct link or QR code, a short neutral request, and one courteous reminder. The process should take the resident less than two minutes.
5. **Respond quickly and specifically.** Acknowledge every review, thank the resident, address factual concerns without exposing private information, and take unresolved matters offline.

WHAT “QUICKLY” SHOULD MEAN

Period	Primary objective	Evidence of progress
Days 1–3	Diagnose and stabilize	Listings corrected; alerts active; top service failures assigned
Days 4–10	Launch outreach	Neutral request sent at approved resident touchpoints
Days 11–20	Build consistency	Every review answered; recovery cases tracked to closure
Days 21–30	Optimize	Response time, request volume, review volume, themes, and rating trend reviewed

1: FIX THE REVIEW-PRODUCING PROBLEMS FIRST

Read the most recent 25–50 reviews across Google and the property’s major apartment-search channels. Tag each comment by issue, then compare it with work orders, resident communications, delinquency disputes, move-in inspections, and call logs. The purpose is not to debate each reviewer; it is to identify patterns.

- **Maintenance:** time to first response, completion time, repeat work orders, entry communication, and confirmation of completion.
- **Communication:** unanswered calls, inconsistent information, slow follow-up, and lack of ownership.
- **Property condition:** trash, landscaping, lighting, gates, common areas, pests, noise, and safety-related observations.
- **Leasing and move-in:** unit readiness, expectation gaps, pricing clarity, fees, keys, utilities, and first-week support.
- **Billing and move-out:** ledger explanations, deposits, fees, notice requirements, and documentation.

FAST OPERATIONAL WIN

Close the loop visibly. After completing a work order, send a short confirmation asking whether the issue was fully resolved. If the resident says no, reopen it before asking for any public review.

2: BUILD AN ETHICAL REVIEW-REQUEST ENGINE

A review program should be systematic enough to run every week but neutral enough to preserve authenticity. The request should go to residents based on an objective event — not based on whether staff predicts a five-star response.

RECOMMENDED TOUCHPOINTS

- **Resolved service request:** send only after the resident confirms completion or has had a reasonable opportunity to inspect the work.
- **Move-in follow-up:** ask after the first-week check-in and resolution of any move-in items.
- **Renewal or resident milestone:** ask after a positive, substantive interaction — not as a condition of receiving a benefit.
- **Resident event or helpful office interaction:** use a general invitation to share an honest experience.
- **Periodic broad outreach:** invite an appropriately defined resident group using the same neutral language.

SAMPLE REQUEST LANGUAGE

Text or email: Thank you for choosing [Property Name]. If you have a moment, we’d appreciate an honest review of your experience. Your feedback helps our team understand what is working and where we need to improve: [direct link]

One reminder: A quick reminder: if you would like to share feedback about your experience at [Property Name], you can do so here: [direct link]. Thank you for helping us improve.

Avoid language such as “Give us five stars,” “Tell everyone how much you love living here,” or any promise tied to a positive rating. Also confirm each platform’s current solicitation and incentive rules before launching a campaign.

3: MAKE IT FRICTIONLESS

Use the direct review link for the property's verified listing. Keep the message short, mobile-friendly, and property-specific. Place a QR code only where a resident can scan it voluntarily; never require a review before receiving service, an amenity, a concession, or entry into an activity.

- **One primary destination:** concentrate effort where prospects most often evaluate the property, while still monitoring all major profiles.
- **One action:** do not bury the review link among surveys, promotions, or multiple calls to action.
- **One reminder:** a single polite follow-up is usually enough; repeated messages can feel coercive and increase opt-outs.
- **Clean listing data:** correct the property name, phone, URL, hours, photos, unit categories, and management responses before driving traffic.

4: RESPOND TO EVERY REVIEW PROFESSIONALLY

Management responses serve two audiences: the reviewer and every prospect who reads the exchange later. A calm, specific response can demonstrate accountability even when the original complaint cannot be resolved publicly.

Review type	Response approach	What to avoid
Positive	Thank the resident; reference one specific detail; reinforce the service standard.	Generic copy pasted verbatim into every reply.
Mixed	Acknowledge the positive point and the concern; explain the next step or invitation to talk.	Ignoring the criticism because the overall rating is favorable.
Negative	Respond promptly; show empathy; avoid arguing; move account-specific discussion offline; investigate internally.	Disclosing resident information, blaming the resident, threatening action, or promising an outcome before facts are known.
Suspected fake	Keep the public response neutral; preserve records; use the platform's reporting process if the content violates policy.	Public accusations, mass flagging of legitimate criticism, or attempts to suppress truthful reviews.

RESPONSE FRAMEWORK: A-C-T

- **Acknowledge:** recognize the resident's experience and thank them for taking the time to comment.
- **Clarify carefully:** correct material misinformation only when it can be done calmly and without revealing private account details.
- **Take action:** state the next step, provide a direct contact, and make sure the internal issue actually reaches an accountable person.

SUGGESTED NEGATIVE-REVIEW RESPONSE

Thank you for sharing this. We are sorry your experience did not meet the standard we expect. We would like to review the details and make sure the matter reaches the right person. Please contact [name/role] at [phone/email] so we can follow up directly.

5: RUN A 30-DAY REPUTATION SPRINT

Timing	Action	Owner	Measure
Days 1-3	Audit listings and recent reviews; identify top three operating issues.	Regional + property manager	Baseline rating, total reviews, unresolved themes
Days 4-7	Correct listings; create links/templates; train team; activate alerts.	Marketing + property manager	Profiles accurate; response standard live
Week 2	Launch requests at approved resident touchpoints; resolve recovery cases.	Leasing + maintenance	Requests sent; reviews received; cases closed
Week 3	Review themes and response quality; coach inconsistent staff.	Regional manager	Median response time; repeat issues
Week 4	Compare results; retain what works; set weekly cadence.	Owner/asset manager	Rating trend, review velocity, sentiment mix

MEASUREMENT: TRACK THE PROCESS, NOT JUST THE STARS

- **Profile accuracy:** percentage of priority listings with correct contact, hours, links, photos, and management information.
- **Response coverage and speed:** percentage of new reviews answered and median time to response.
- **Request activity:** eligible touchpoints, requests sent, delivery rate, and resident opt-outs.
- **Review velocity:** new reviews per week and per 100 occupied units, with no star-rating quota.
- **Resident recovery:** negative-feedback cases assigned, contacted, resolved, and recurring issues eliminated.
- **Theme trend:** frequency of maintenance, communication, cleanliness, billing, safety, and move-in comments.

RATING MATH: SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

A simple planning estimate is:

$$\left[(\text{current rating} \times \text{current review count}) \div \text{sum of new review ratings} \right] \div \left[\text{total review count after the campaign} \right]$$

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

A property with a 3.2 rating across 100 reviews that receives 20 new five-star reviews would rise to approximately 3.5 — not 4.0. This is why consistent operations and sustained review volume matter more than a short burst.

COMPLIANCE AND REPUTATION GUARDRAILS

The FTC's Consumer Reviews and Testimonials Rule and individual platform policies make shortcuts both risky and counterproductive. Before launch, management should approve the outreach language, target rules, vendor practices, recordkeeping, and escalation process.

- **Never buy, fabricate, or use AI to generate resident reviews.** Reviews should reflect a genuine experience.
- **Never condition compensation or benefits on positive sentiment.** A disclosure does not cure a requirement for a five-star or positive review.
- **Do not ask only residents expected to be satisfied.** Use objective eligibility rules and neutral language.
- **Do not suppress truthful criticism.** Report content only when there is a good-faith basis under the platform's rules.
- **Disclose material connections.** Employees, managers, agents, relatives, and compensated reviewers can create regulatory and credibility risk.
- **Follow the strictest applicable rule.** The FTC may permit some practices that a particular platform prohibits; platform-specific policies still govern use of that platform.

MEASUREMENT: TRACK THE PROCESS, NOT JUST THE STARS

- Verified listings and review alerts are active.
- The top three review-producing operational problems have owners and deadlines.
- Request language is neutral and approved.
- Eligibility is based on objective resident touchpoints, not predicted sentiment.
- Staff can locate and use the correct direct-review link.
- Every review has a response owner and response-time standard.
- Sensitive resident information never appears in a public response.
- Suspected policy violations are documented and reported through the platform process.
- Weekly reporting includes both reputation results and operating causes.

CONCLUSION

Online reviews can improve quickly, but only when the campaign is rooted in operational truth. A property that repairs recurring service failures, asks broadly and neutrally, removes friction, and responds with discipline will build a stronger reputation than one chasing a temporary star-rating target. The durable advantage is not merely a better profile—it is a management system that converts resident feedback into better performance.

Sources and Further Guidance

- **Federal Trade Commission, "The Consumer Reviews and Testimonials Rule: Questions and Answers,"**
<https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/consumer-reviews-testimonials-rule-questions-answers>
- **Federal Trade Commission, "Soliciting and Paying for Online Reviews: A Guide for Marketers,"**
<https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/soliciting-paying-online-reviews-guide-marketers>
- **Google Maps, "Prohibited & Restricted Content,"**
<https://support.google.com/contributionpolicy/answer/7400114>
- **Google Maps, "Incentivized or Biased Reviews,"**
<https://support.google.com/contributionpolicy/answer/16597558>

ABOUT HBS GLOBAL CORPORATION

HBS Global Corporation provides executive advisory services to multifamily owners seeking to improve property performance, strengthen operating discipline, and increase asset value. HBS works alongside ownership and management teams to diagnose underperformance, develop practical turnaround strategies, improve occupancy and revenue, and create measurable accountability at the property level.

Our approach combines an owner's perspective with hands-on operating experience. Engagements are tailored to the needs of each asset—from focused leasing and reputation initiatives to broader operational turnarounds and value-creation plans.

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