
Online consumer reviews — Principles and requirements for their collection, moderation and publication

*Avis en ligne de consommateurs — Principes et exigences portant sur
les processus de collecte, modération et publication des avis*

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Published in Switzerland

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for whom a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation on the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) see the following URL: www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by ISO/TC 290, *Online reputation*.

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Introduction

Online review sites offer consumers the chance to give feedback about their experience of using products and services, for the benefit of other consumers who might be considering buying or using them, as well as valuable feedback for the suppliers that provide the products and services.

A vast number of consumer transactions and interactions now take place via the internet, and millions of consumers each year read and write online reviews. The rapid growth of consumer review sites, covering a wide range of products (e.g. clothes, electrical appliances, toys, cars) and services (e.g. restaurants, hotels, builders, plumbers, electricians, lawyers), has the potential to empower consumers and drive industry improvements, by creating a more dynamic way to exchange information. Not only are suppliers asking for consumer reviews, consumers are talking back, and talking to each other.

Review sites can benefit consumers, making it easier to research products and services, and identify those that best suit their needs in terms of function, price, quality and value for money. They allow consumers to share information about their experiences, and to seek feedback and opinions from thousands of other users. Online reviews can also be a valuable resource for suppliers, helping them to meet the needs and expectations of their customers. Consumers with personal experience of using their products or services can help to identify areas of improvement leading to better quality products, better systems, procedures and customer service. Smart suppliers understand that proactively encouraging user reviews, and responding quickly and positively to feedback, can help them to keep customers and win new ones.

As online reviews are increasingly influential to consumers' purchasing decisions, it is vital to both consumers and suppliers that sites are managed effectively to build confidence in the quality, integrity, accuracy and transparency of reviews. Both consumers and suppliers have reported some problems with online reviews. These problems might be intentional or unintentional, but can lead to a degradation of trust in the online review process. Some problems reported include:

- false positive reviews written by the supplier itself intending to mislead consumers;
- false negative reviews written by a supplier's competitors intending to ward off consumers from the organization;
- the activity of businesses specialized in "online reputation management" who offer e-commerce companies services to improve their online reviews;
- consumers using their newfound position of public critic and in effect obtaining better circumstances or other benefits from a supplier that they review;
- a lack of trust concerning the veracity of consumers' reviews, and whether organizations select the better reviews, and remove the negative ones;
- suppliers that use consumers to write positive reviews or penalize them for writing negative reviews, in some cases contracting consumers out of the right to write a negative review.

These issues form the basis for the principles in this document that are designed to resolve them.

This document offers requirements to organizations that manage consumer review sites, detailing good practice throughout the process, from collection to moderation and to publication. It gives recommendations in order to increase consumer trust in online consumer reviews, increase the protection of suppliers from exploitation and mischief, and improve the purchase decisions of consumers and the quality of products and services provided by organizations.

Organizations that choose to follow this document can be considered to be demonstrating that they value their customers and are committed to providing reviews that consumers can trust.

Online consumer reviews — Principles and requirements for their collection, moderation and publication

1 Scope

This document provides requirements and recommendations for the principles and methods for review administrators to apply in their collection, moderation and publication of online consumer reviews.

This document is applicable to any organization that publishes consumer reviews online, including suppliers of products and services that collect reviews from their own customers, a third party contracted by the supplier, or an independent third party. It is recognized that the different processes related to the collection, moderation and publication can at various times be performed by different organizations. This document is applicable to reviews published online, collected by any methodology.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1

consumer review

recorded information made publicly available by a consumer [deemed to be a *review author* (3.8)] about a specified product or service provided or sold by a *supplier* (3.6)

3.2

consumer

member of the general public purchasing or using products or services from a supplier

3.3

consumer experience date

calendar date and time when the consumer made use of the product or service

3.4

identification

process for obtaining information necessary to confirm the review author as a real person

3.5

geolocation

process whereby the geographical coordinates (latitude and longitude) of a review author can be obtained automatically to identify their location

3.6

supplier

organization or individual providing a product or service being reviewed by consumers on the online review site

3.7

collection

means of obtaining a review related to a consumer experience

3.8

review author

consumer (3.2) writing a review for publication on the review site

3.9

terms and conditions

set of criteria published on the review site that specify the rules with which review authors and suppliers will comply if they wish to submit information for publication on the review site

3.10

unsolicited review

consumer's evaluation of a product or service that is provided without being requested by the supplier or the review administrator

3.11

solicited review

consumer's review of a product or service requested by the supplier or review administrator

3.12

total rating

score given by a review author to sum up their evaluation of a specific product or service

3.13

rating

value, classification, or ranking of a product or service by a consumer

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Note 1 to entry: Rating enables a consumer to give their opinion using a rating scale (0 to 5, 1 to 5, 1 to 10, 1 to 100, A to D, etc.).

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Note 2 to entry: This scale may be represented by symbols (smileys, stars, coloured dots, symbols, etc.); however, these symbols should avoid creating confusion with any rating that may exist elsewhere.

3.14

submission date

moment at which the review is submitted to the review administrator by the consumer

3.15

conflict of interest

situation in which a review author has interests connected to the supplier, product or service that could compromise the independent nature of their review

3.16

specific marking

distinctive sign denoting a characteristic of a consumer review

3.17

moderation

filtering, analysis, or processes conducted automatically or by human means with a view to accept or reject a consumer review

3.18

review administrator

organization or individual responsible for managing the consumer review content, which may be the supplier of the products and services being reviewed

Note 1 to entry: This can be a third party contracted by the supplier, or an independent third party.

Note 2 to entry: The different processes related to collection, moderation and publication may at various times be performed by different organizations.

3.19

overall rating

score for a specific product or service, calculated by the review administrator, that combines all of the individual ratings given by review authors about that product or service

3.20

test reviews

method of authenticating the dependability of the review administrator's processes

3.21

flagging

function enabling consumers or suppliers to draw the attention of the review administrator to any content deemed suspicious

3.22

process

interrelated or interacting activities that transform inputs into outputs

3.23

Single Sign-On

SSO

function enabling a user to access a number of websites or applications with a single User ID and password

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4 Guiding principles and organizational commitment

4.1 Guiding principles

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The organization, its review administrator and its staff shall deliver a service that takes the following guiding principles into account at all stages of planning, design and delivery.

- a) **Integrity:** demonstrates integrity by ensuring that the review site reflects the opinions of legitimate review authors who have acquired a product or service and have submitted reviews.
- b) **Accuracy:** ensures that processes of collecting, moderating and publishing consumer reviews produces reviews that as far as reasonably possible are accurate; that is, adequate, current and not misleading.
- c) **Privacy:** ensures the protection of review authors' personal information.
- d) **Security:** makes certain that all systems have anti-fraud mechanisms in place to protect personal data from internal and external fraud.
- e) **Transparency:** ensures the organization's practices on the disclosure of information to consumers, suppliers, personnel and other interested parties regarding online consumer reviews are visible in all its undertakings, decisions and policies. The organization should be transparent about all methodologies, and ownership, that may impact or influence a consumer's use of the review site.
- f) **Accessibility:** ensures information on the review site is easy to find and presented in a clear and simple format so that it can be read and understood by consumers and suppliers.
- g) **Responsiveness:** responds to communications from consumers, suppliers and other interested parties concerning its online consumer review site and takes appropriate action without undue delay.

4.2 Organizational commitment

4.2.1 Culture

The organization should facilitate a culture that demonstrates commitment to the guiding principles identified in [4.1](#). This commitment should be supported by senior management.

4.2.2 Code of practice

The organization shall develop a written code of practice, communicated and made available to all management and staff, which outlines how this document and the guiding principles in [4.1](#) will be met and maintained.

4.2.3 Terms and conditions

4.2.3.1 General

The organization shall develop a written set of terms and conditions that state the rules and criteria to be complied with for anyone wishing to submit a review.

4.2.3.2 Accessibility

These terms and conditions shall be

- easily accessible to all review authors and suppliers and
- accepted by the review author before submitting a review.

4.2.3.3 Non-compliance

It shall be made clear that non-compliance with these terms and conditions may lead to rejection or removal of reviews.

4.2.3.4 Criteria

The terms and conditions shall include the following criteria.

- The content describes a personal consumer experience of the product or service being reviewed.
- All information is factually correct, to the best of the review author's knowledge.
- The content does not contain defamatory language.

Furthermore the terms and conditions should include the following criteria.

- The content is intelligible to readers (e.g. without random characters or the use of sequences of words without meaning).
- Any conflicts of interest are clearly disclosed within the review.
- The content does not contain personal information that would allow members of the public to identify or contact private individuals (e.g. telephone numbers, precise physical addresses or email addresses).
- The content does not contain any financial information (e.g. credit card number, social security number, bank account number) that could result in identity theft.
- The content does not contain any marketing materials.

The review administrator can add to this list. However, it cannot define any additional criteria that could cause bias in the evaluation of the product or service concerned.

4.3 Continual improvement

The organization shall continually update and improve the service that it offers. This can be accomplished by:

- monitoring consumer and supplier feedback, and responding to that feedback;
- continually improving the effectiveness and efficiency of its processes;
- reviewing, identifying, considering and applying new concepts and practices into their processes;
- encouraging innovation in the development of services and procedures;
- providing relevant staff training and personnel development opportunities; and
- recognizing examples of outstanding performance and practices related to the process.

4.4 Communication channels

4.4.1 General

The organization shall develop effective channels of communication with the suppliers of products and services reviewed on their site, to share relevant and valuable feedback from review authors.

4.4.2 Dedicated contact channel for suppliers

The review administrator shall provide a specific clearly communicated contact channel, to allow contact from suppliers of products and services being reviewed.

NOTE A contact channel can be a phone number or email address for the specific purpose of supplier enquiries.

4.4.3 Providing feedback to suppliers

The review administrator should contact suppliers of products and services alerting them to any serious safety issues or potential risks highlighted in consumer reviews.

4.4.3.1 Register the supplier

The review administrator should offer suppliers reviewed on its site the opportunity to register a business online profile so that they can receive alerts when new consumer reviews are published.

4.4.3.2 Third party managing reviews

Where a third party is managing reviews on behalf of a supplier, the review administrator should liaise with suppliers to discuss the best way to share relevant and valuable feedback from review authors which may assist in improving products and services.

4.5 Resource capability

The organization should ensure that it has sufficient resources available for process planning, designing, reviewing, identifying, considering and applying new concepts and practices for continual improvement.

NOTE Resources can include, but are not limited to IT systems, and the knowledge, training and experience required by the staff that will manage and operate the process.