



Front & Back of the House

Social Media—an Indicator of Success



Gael Hees

Sep 1, 2018

Pictured: Boulder Dam Brewing Company Owner Todd Cook and his wife Deborah Downs. Photo courtesy of Boulder Dam Brewing Company.

For some, social media in all of its incarnations, is the most exciting thing in the world. For others it's



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drudgery and more often than not, not done well if done at all. For Todd Cook, brewer and co-owner of Boulder Dam Brewing Co., it is simply part of his job.

He reads—and responds—to every single review on Yelp, Facebook, TripAdvisor and Twitter. That is every single one. “If someone cares enough to take the time to communicate with us about their experiences, I feel like they deserve a response,” said Cook. If it is a short, positive statement such as “great beer,” or “had a blast,” Cook will respond almost immediately with something short and pithy, incorporating a “thank you” and ending with “Cheers, Todd.”

However, if it is a complaint or negative post, it takes longer for him to respond. First, he researches what happened. Was the order wrong because of a mix-up in the kitchen, or was the order written down wrong in the first place? He wants to know why the food wasn’t delivered to

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the table in a timely manner. Why was the beer hot? Oops, this one never happens.

He looks at the week's tickets, finds the one that relates to the problem and talks with his waitstaff and kitchen team about the reviewer's issue. He mentions the issue without naming names in staff meetings. By then, he is ready to respond to the reviewer.

"These responses have to be worded carefully," says Cook. "I want to apologize, but it has to be sincere. Sometimes I'll write a response and work on it for a while, thinking about how it sounds."

Cook admits that his responses aren't specifically for the original reviewer, choosing to make his responses accessible to everyone. "I always make it public, because my responses are less meant for the person who left the review, than those reading it," said Cook. "Hope to see you again, you're awesome,' my response is to half for them, but I

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Chef Talk

write it knowing that other people are going to read that response.”

Cook enjoys the positive reviews. Who doesn't? But it is the negative responses he learns from.

For example, Cook works to preempt issues during his busy times by asking his host to let people know the time it will take to be seated and the time it may take to receive their food. “For nearly every bad review we get, the reviewer was here on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon,” said Cook. “They were here at a peak time, 1 to 3 p.m., when we're banging. Most of the negative reviews have to do with the time it took to be seated or receive an order.”

The brewery has great review averages: 4.6 on Trip Advisor, 4.4 on Facebook, and 3.8 on Yelp. According to Cook, people tell him that the 3.8 is a great average on Yelp, but he says, “It breaks my heart.”

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Many of Cook's international guests use TripAdvisor more than any of the other platforms. Some even write the reviews in their native languages. No problem! Cook simply copies the review and pops it in Google Translate, reads the review and writes a response, pops it in Google Translate again, and pastes it in TripAdvisor. He responds to every single post.

Cook doesn't want customers at the brewery, he wants friends. He wants people to just come and hang out. To that end, the Boulder Dam Brewing Co. features live music every weekend; hosts Geeks Who Drink, a trivia contest modeled after the British pub quizzes; sponsors annual events such as a charity zombie walk and brew festival; and has at least two special event nights each month. Cook is even working on developing a cornhole league! But what is important here is the fact that none of these activities would be as successful as they are without the brewery's social media presence. Cook is constantly tweeting,

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posting and uploading when he's not answering questions and responding to posts.

It's true that Cook's phone alerts every time there's a new response on any of his social media platforms. "It's as important to me in today's world to talk to the customers in the electronic sphere, perhaps unfortunately, as when they're in your pub," he said. He thinks that's true, but the fact that you'll find him in the pub almost every day, and often bartending, makes one think his in-person commitment is equally strong.

Gael Hees is a Las Vegas freelancer, specializing in written, graphic and audiovisual communications. She has written for national publications and has won numerous awards for tourism-related printed materials and videos, is accredited in public relations by the Public Relations Society of America and is a certified hospitality educator. gael.hees@icloud.com

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