



New Data Reveals Spike in Online Business Reviews

Orlando, FLA., May 15, 2018 - Online reviews are becoming increasingly important and influential, guiding consumers to make decisions about where to shop, eat, and do business. Particularly for restaurants, operators' decision about whether to engage with online reviews posted by guests can sometime mean the difference between failure and success.

Yet-to-be-published research from [Xenial](#) and [Merchant Centric](#) reveals a dramatic increase in the amount of online reviews for U.S. businesses. From March 2017 to 2018, company reviews online increased by a staggering **66% to over 610 million total reviews, according to analysis of 27 million U.S. businesses.** (See graphs below).

The restaurant industry also saw a sharp increase in both guest engagement and restaurants actively engaging reviewers online. Restaurant reviews from the 10 most reviewed categories jumped from **86 million in 2017 to 141 million in 2018—a 64% increase year-over-year.**

The data also delved into the top ten restaurant categories and their frequency of guest engagement* by category:

Most engagement

1. Steakhouses
2. Seafood
3. American

Least engagement

1. Chinese
2. Pizza
3. Mexican

** Guest engagement is relative to guests leaving reviews, relative to other categories, not the rate at which these businesses are responding.*

Restaurants are ahead of other industries in leveraging this guest outreach. According to the data, the restaurant industry is far more proactive in responding to guests' online reviews. **From March 2017 – March 2018 alone, there was a 29% increase in restaurants responding to online reviews;** and overall they respond to guests at a higher rate than all other business.

With so much importance being placed on how businesses engage with restaurant guests to keep them coming back and attracting new guests, both Xenial and Merchant Centric are excellent resources in providing insight as to how businesses are managing their reputation online and using guest feedback to improve experience and drive sales.

Methodology

Merchant Centric database is a proprietary collection of consumer ratings and reviews for over 25 million business locations that have appeared on top search, social and reviews sites. Merchant Centric has been collecting data since 2010 and has a patent on how it identifies business categories and organizes the ratings and reviews. Using the collected data, each month Merchant Centric counts reviews and responses for all businesses down to the category level.

About Xenial

Xenial, Inc., a Global Payments Company, serves merchants with a range of leading customer engagement and commerce technology solutions. More than 100,000 merchant locations rely on the Xenial™ Analytics customer engagement platform in their marketing automation programs. Xenial Analytics helps these merchants understand – and engage effectively with – their existing customers and acquire new ones. Xenial Analytics customer engagement solutions include business-to-consumer customer relationship management (CRM), Xenial Analytics, Email Marketing, Demographics, Gift, Stored Value & Loyalty, and Social Reputation Management.

Xenial, formerly Heartland Commerce, serves 135,000 restaurant customers across the U.S. including 83,000 independent businesses. Xenial provides a complete cloud restaurant management platform for a fixed monthly price and running on an unlimited number of devices including iOS, Android, and Windows. The company owns five point-of-sale (POS) brands including, XPIENT Solutions, pcAmerica, Dinerware, LiquorPOS, and Digital Dining that capture 19 percent of the U.S. restaurant POS market in all 50 states. For more information, visit xenial.com.

About Merchant Centric

Recognized by CIO Review Magazine as the company that “pioneered the science of leveraging online customer reviews to drive performance and revenues for businesses,” Merchant Centric serves major brands as well as small businesses in the restaurant, hospitality, automotive, and health/medical service industries. Merchant Centric’s serves over 30,000 business locations with its suite of Online Guest Engagement Management and data solutions including: Industry leading analytics, reputation management platforms, management and field reports, as well as managed services, including Full Service Reply to Review. For more information contact David Bay at David@MerchantCentric.com or 818-889-1688 or Adam Leff at Adam@MerchantCentric.com.