


Mixed feelings about 4.5 * Yelp rating

Chain Reaction Bicycles 4.5 Rating Details View Business on Yelp

39 Reviews for Chain Reaction Bicycles


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 Elle '13 49 164 3/12/2013

Excellent service and staff. The store is impeccably clean and well organized. Can't ask for a better store experience.

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 Luis S. 0 6 2/7/2013

Friendly service 0-attitude good knowledgeable staff excellent products, you do get what you pay for and don't to expect any bike to last forever. Things wear out and need to be serviced and replaced. This is a business like any other and they have their rules. Nobody is perfect. But they are a very accomodating and reasonable shop.

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 Karl D. 0 2 1/26/2013

Steve and the whole gang at Chain Reaction really are the best! I have bought several bikes over the years from them, which has always gone well. But the thing I love the most is their customer service. Time and again I have very positive service experiences, including quick turns on simple repairs when they knew I

I should be thrilled that our Los Altos store has achieved a 4.5 Star rating on Yelp. And I am! It's a great indication that we're doing a few things right. But I've got more than a few mixed feelings about Yelp. And not just because we're "only" at 4 Stars in Redwood City.



A success story

On the one hand, it's a great window into what people think, and it keeps you on your toes. At its best, it's a two-way street, where you can respond to reviews and they respond back. Sometimes you can fix misunderstandings, sometimes you can make things right where you screwed up. I feel really good about that. Believe it or not, I want happy customers. Why a select few think otherwise has been the cause of more than a few sleepless nights over the years.



An (un)deserved rant?

But eventually you discover that some people that have it in for you, no matter what. Like the one on the right. I did my personal best for him, even exploiting my connection with Keith Bontrager to make sure the information I gave was accurate and relevant. Did not matter. Thankfully it was so over-the-top that I couldn't really feel all that bad about it.

The biggest flaw in Yelp's review process is that they allow for one-way communication, where someone can vent and you have no opportunity to correspond with them. The "cloak of anonymity" thing that removes credibility from much of the modern world. You can hit & run on a competitor (I've seen this first-hand) or trash a business just because you needed a lawnmower part and were annoyed (and didn't believe) that a bicycle shop didn't have it.

In my perfect world, when someone trashes a business and the business responds, Yelp should require that the reviewer respond to that business (a response that can remain anonymous) or else the review is removed. There should simply be some sense of accountability. Without that, you actually get people demanding better deals in the store or else threaten to post a Yelp review trashing us. And stores taking advantage by offering deals to people in exchange for high ratings, a practice that you can actually find referenced in some reviews.

We don't ask for reviews (which is probably dumb, because if you do ask for reviews from good customers, you're likely to bolster your ratings... but I just feel funny about it) and we actually fired an employee who posted a fake positive review for our store. Seriously. That wasn't the only thing he did, but it was way up on the list.

And finally there's Yelp's own business practices. We signed up for a 6-month campaign, \$315/store/month, where you essentially buy a higher placing when someone's looking for bike shops, and you get a high-rated review moved up to the top. Bad reviews aren't eliminated, they're just moved down the page. We told the (very aggressive) Yelp rep that we'd just be doing this for the busy season, end it after 6 months, and then perhaps restart again the following year. 6 months went and the billings continued. Phone calls and emails couldn't stop them. I finally had to call the bank to have the payments stopped. Crazy!

Could Chain Reaction ever get a 5-Star yelp rating? I don't think so. Could be that I'm just rationalizing, but as long as we try to be inclusive, and take care of as wide a variety of cyclists as practical, we're going to have situations where we're not the ultimate source for, say, fixie parts, or cotter pins for that 34-year-old Firenze in the basement. Our location in Redwood City has a broader range of demographics than most, giving us a much wider clientele than the typical shop gets to deal with. That appeals to my sense of egalitarianism, but gets in the way of becoming a super-specialty-retailer that can give white-glove treatment to everyone coming in the door. Am I trying to rationalize? You bet. But I think I have solid ground to do so. I think, on balance, Chain Reaction has more heart than most. I think my staff does an awesome job. And when we fail, we feel badly, and work to make things right. Hopefully that comes out in my Yelp responses.

In the end, I think consumer review sites like Yelp are a good thing. You get a sense of what the shop's like, reading both the review and, if it's there, the reply from the business. I'm just not a fan of the complete anonymity and lack of accountability, which, as I mentioned earlier, could be easily fixed by simply requiring a dialog between reviewer and the business. A dialog that could remain anonymous! But a dialog nevertheless. In my perfect world, of course. --Mike--