The Ultimate Guide to Customer Reviews for Travel, Tourism and Leisure Brands

How to win over more customers and optimise your online reputation

About this Guide

Online reviews are amongst the top three considerations for choosing a travel brand[1] — and they are rapidly moving up the ladder as one the most critical channels multi-location brands and businesses in the travel, tourism and leisure space can use to boost sales and reach more prospective customers.

Today's travellers decide where and how they want to engage with brands and businesses on multiple platforms and technologies. Adding to that, they also talk to other consumers online about your brand.

As leaders of their buying journeys, consumers are actively "pulling" information to help them make a purchasing decision. Whether it's seeking ideas, filtering options, narrowing prices or deals.

So when it comes to making a purchasing decision, consumers will increasingly turn to the advice of their peers and to brands that have earned their trust based on their experience interacting with the brand. Reviews provide easily accessible "proof" from your customers that may influence other consumers' buying decisions.

By tapping into the power of reviews, travel brands can not only improve the customer experience but also stay ahead of their competitors. Positive customer reviews also influence your ranking in local search results, resulting in increased clicks, visits, sales and leads.

In this guide, you'll learn:

- The new customer journey
- Reviews as the new currency
- Why review management is crucial for reaching more consumers
- Four-step reputation management guide
- What to look for and how to respond to customer reviews
- How to learn from customer feedback
- Steps to optimise your online reputation with a 'Near Me' Brand Experience

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[1] https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/frequent-traveler-loyalty/

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"Online reviews are today's word of mouth recommendations."

The Modern Travellers' New Booking Journey

Today's customer journey is hybrid and unpredictable and no longer resembles the typical marketing funnel. Empowered by an abundance of information at their fingertips, consumers are now owning the customer journey, and no two customer journeys are the same. Adding to that, trust is not easily won, but easily lost.

Trustpilot found 68% of people believe holidays are an important personal investment[2] — making it more important than ever for travel, tourism and leisure brands to differentiate themselves from the competition and build trustworthy relationships with their customers and prospects.

Digital touchpoints such as online reviews are one of the best ways to stand out in a crowded marketplace. They also:

- Open the door for you to have conversations with your customers
- Help you better understand your customers expectations
- Improve your brand's strengths and weaknesses, so you can customise their experience

[2] https://uk.business.trustpilot.com/reviews/11-reasons-why-online-review-trust-matters-to-travel-infographic

The Current Marketing Challenges for Travel, Tourism and Leisure Brands

It's no secret that mobile use continues to change the way people travel. Our travel agent and tour guides are now located inside of our pocket.

As a result, 'near me' searches have grown in recent years and will soon surpass 50% of all search volume. Adding to that, more than 80% of all 'near me' search queries are unbranded, which means consumers aren't searching for a particular brand.

To remain competitive, brands must offer their customers a compelling 'Near Me' Brand Experience at every touchpoint starting in their search and discovery on review platforms such as Google My Business, Yelp, TripAdvisor and TrustPilot.

Today's Traveller in The Age of 'Near Me'

When mobile users are ready to act, they act quickly. This means that the time is shortening between searching for a travel service and booking it. More importantly, for brick-and-mortar businesses, time is shortening between online discovery and physically walking through the storefront doors.

'Near me' searches have exploded in recent years, and online listings are increasingly critical to driving foot traffic.

Looking at today's fragmented customer journey, this means everything from:

- Connecting at the initial digital interactions around search and discovery
- Building online engagement and following through to offline conversion
- Creating loyalty and advocacy through recommendations and repurchase

From booking a family vacation in California to searching for the "best city tours in London near me now" consumers don't want any surprises along their information gathering and buying journey.

They're turning to their mobiles phones and relying on search queries, such as "best hop-on, hop-off bus tour near me" and recent reviews from happy customers to build excitement as they countdown to their experience. They also want to map out their experience beforehand: from confirming opening and closing hours to wait times.

However, if consumers find hundreds of rave reviews on their preferred platforms, and your teams on the ground offer memorable interactions there's a great chance you'll see them again soon.

Reviews Are the New Currency

Online reviews are today's word of mouth recommendations. Consumers will form an opinion about you before ever walking through your doors — by consulting customer reviews on Yelp, TripAdvisor, Facebook and Google first.

Standout reviews are critical for establishing trust and helping consumers make their purchasing decisions. Adding to that, consumers are not only reading reviews, but they're also giving them, too.

Every time your potential customers use words such as best, top, great and highest rated, Google will show them businesses with a review rating of 4.0 or higher in the results first.

Do Reviews Really Matter?

How influential are reviews on actual sales? According to a study published in Inc. magazine, 84% of people trust online reviews[3] as much as they trust a recommendation from a friend. An Invesp study also says customers are likely to spend 31% more money at a business with "excellent" reviews.[4]

In the UK, consumer reliance on online reviews for the hospitality sector has steadily increased:

According to our findings from our Reputation Management Report, analyzing 64,000 Google My Business profiles, a 4.9-star rating achieves the highest conversion rate. While a star rating increase of just .1 can increase conversion rates by 25%.

This is great news for travel, tourism and leisure brands that always get great reviews and know how to leverage them — or for brands with a dedicated social media team watchingfor every brand mention on every platform.

For brands with overstretched marketing teams, it can be hard to scale efforts and react quickly everywhere your brand may be generating buzz — whether positive or negative.

Search alerts can't always find references deep in review sites, or tag social media conversations about your brand. And even if you are able to find those glowing or scathing reviews, what do you do to turn that review into a net positive?

[3] https://www.inc.com/craig-bloem/84-percent-of-people-trust-online-reviews-as-much-.html
[4] https://www.inc.com/craig-bloem/84-percent-of-people-trust-online-reviews-as-much-.html
[5] https://uberall.com/en-gb/company/press-releases/over-three-quarters-of-uk-consumers-check-online-reviews-with-TripAdvisor-2-5-times-more-influential-than-google

Which Reviews Should You Be Monitoring?

You may not like this, but the short answer is, all of them. A review on a site you may not know about or aren't paying attention to might be the one that is poisoning the well. As for which review sites carry the most impact, it depends.

A 2019 Uberall consumer survey found UK consumers turn to TripAdvisor, the world's largest travel site, for its online reviews the most, along with these key findings:

- 76% of UK consumers have checked online reviews on TripAdvisor, Google, Facebook or Yelp or other online review websites[6]

- 68% have checked online reviews on TripAdvisor, compared to Google (27%), Facebook (18%) and Yelp (4%)[7]

While a similar Uberall survey of US consumers revealed the exact opposite result: US consumers rely on Google more than TripAdvisor when checking online reviews.

Reading and responding to reviews can help businesses to discover more about their target market and see the business through the customer's eyes. Even more importantly, best practice review management — encouraging, tracking and responding to online feedback — can sway customer purchasing decisions, particularly as reviews and other user generated content influence where a brand ranks in search results.

What Can You Learn from Monitoring Reviews?

As difficult as you may feel reading bad reviews, it's important not to see them as the enemy of your brand. Yes, negative feedback feels personal, but the truth is most reviews are a gift — even when they aren't glowing. They show you things you may not have realised about your brand and give an actual roadmap for improvement.

Would it be preferable to hear that feedback in a less public forum? Sure. But for every review you read, you can be certain there are at least a few — and probably many — more people out there who are experiencing the same problem.

A review is your chance to correct the problem before even more customers are impacted — and to show the reviewer and anyone else reading how much a brand cares. Reviews are a second chance.

Positive reviews can also teach us something, because they show us what we're doing right. In fact, 69% of holidaymakers will choose a holiday provider with better reviews over a cheaper one with poorer reviews.[8]

Positive reviews show us what customers love and we can do more of — so don't ignore the good reviews in a rush to fix problems. Knowing and recording what your customers love about your brand can help you benchmark your reputation and continue to delight your customers.

[6] https://uberall.com/en-gb/company/press-releases/over-three-quarters-of-uk-consumers-check-online-reviews-with-TripAdvisor-2-5-times-more-influential-than-google
[7] https://uberall.com/en-gb/company/press-releases/over-three-quarters-of-uk-consumers-check-online-reviews-with-TripAdvisor-2-5-times-more-influential-than-google
[8] https://uk.business.trustpilot.com/reviews/11-reasons-why-online-review-trust-matters-to-travel-infographic

What Results Can You Expect?

According to findings from our **Reputation Management Report**:

- Enterprise business locations that reply to 32% of reviews achieve 80% more conversions than businesses that reply to 10% of reviews

- SMB locations that reply to 32% of reviews achieve 40% less conversions than enterprise locations replying to the same amount

Our research tells us that consumer conversion rates skyrocket when brands engage with them online and reply to their reviews.

That said, the more a business location replies to customer reviews, the more conversions that location seems to get.

Four-Step Reputation Management for Multi-Location Marketers

Hopefully, we've made it clear how important it is to pay attention to reviews. But what is the best process to follow, and how can you respond in the most effective way?

Here's a four-step process we recommend you follow, to keep review-savvy customers happy and win new customers:

① Monitor Reputation Online

Know when there are reviews out there. Be sure you're regularly watching review sites for reviews of yourbrand, or — even better —monitoring, flagging or replying to reviews. Be timely. Respond to most reviews within 24-48 hours for maximum impact.

② Measure, Track and Set Goals for Online Reputation

Keep track over time. It's important to monitor and analyze your review data, so you can monitor trends and issues, and use the insight to get ahead of similiar problems that may likely occur in your locations.

Check those emotions. Everyone gets bad reviews once in a while, so it's important to maintain perspective.

③ Assess and Investigate

Figure out what happened. Think through reviews first in an unemotional way by asking yourself:

- Is what the customer saying true?
- What really happened?
- Is this a known problem, misunderstanding or critical failure?

This is vital information to know before you reply. Understanding what went wrong (or right) first makes it easier to resolve an issue.

Learn from the feedback. Don't mope about a one-star review, or pat yourself on the back for a five-star one. Ask yourself: How can you use this response to grow and improve?

Create an action plan. Now that you know what happened, keep the following in mind:

- Can you address the problem right away and share your actions with your customer?
- What can you do to prioritise the reviewer's situation and make things right? For example, if the problem was low inventory on a favorite item, can you put in an order for more and set one aside for the customer?
- If the customer was upset about a quality issue, can you offer a replacement? Having a solution ready before anyone goes to respond can help make the process much easier and ensure a better outcome.

④ Respond to Reviews

Our friends at Yelp suggest you keep three things in mind as you respond to customer reviews:

1. Remember these aren't just internet cranks, they are paying customers.
2. They are also human beings, with feelings and emotions that were strong enough to send them to write about you.
3. They are vocal and opinionated.

That last one is Yelp's way of reminding us that if these customers were moved to write one review, they probably won't stop there. They will be out there building up or smack-talking your brand until you communicate with them.

Thank the reviewer

Then reinforce that thanks with specifics to show you are sincere.

"Thanks for the great review, Cynthia! We love our bedding, too, which is why at London Boutique Hotel we always use organic linens from sustainable sources. Have you tried our robes? They are made from bamboo and are extremely soft! Be sure to try them out the next time you are at any of our UK locations with a pool. — Belle S., Front of House Manager."

Never use canned replies, which are likely to backfire, as people won't feel very special.

Name names

Use a real name in the reply (see above) and consider repeating your brand name in a reply for a potential extra SEO boost (see above).

Invite them back

Be welcoming and tell the customer you hope they will return (as in the organic bedding example above). Don't ask reviewers to do anything more. As Yelp suggests: "When contacting a positive reviewer, your purpose should be simply to deliver a human thank you and let them know you care. That's it. "

Don't try to market or upsell

Similar to the advice above, don't take a review as an invitation to market to a customer more aggressively. Google says: "Your reviewers are already customers, so there's no need to offer incentives or advertisements. Tell reviewers something new about your business, or share something they might not have learned from their first visit."

Share the love

Consider sharing the reviews on other channels, such as your website or social media.

Don't be redundant

There's no need to respond at length to every single positive review — especially if those reviews are brief and you have nothing interesting to highlight. As Yelp suggests: "If you want to thank someone for a positive review, send a direct message instead. Comments that simply thank users without providing new information can be perceived as overbearing."

Be humble

Thank the customer for taking the time to share their experience with you. Don't make excuses. Don't go on the attack. Just thank them. "Thank you for your feedback about your visit to our travel agency. I'm so sorry you had a long wait time. We try hard to ensure we have enough staff during busy hours, but it looks like we fell short."

Apologise and empathise

Reaffirm that you heard what they said by repeating it back, and then say you are sorry they had that experience. Even if you don't agree. "We understand how frustrating it can be to be excited about an offer you saw in an ad and then see the dates are too restricted."

Be calm, neutral, and de-escalate

As Yelp suggests: "But please be very careful here: if your reviewer perceives that you are being rude, condescending or disingenuous in any way, there's a chance he or she could get angry and make the situation even worse. Keep in mind that this is a vocal customer who could well copy and paste your message all over the Web."

"I'm very sorry you found our prices for a city holiday package to be higher than you'd expected. While some of our packages do cost more than booking direct online, we do also offer less expensive alternatives that we'd be happy to show you the next time you visit us!"

Take personal responsibility

As Google says: "Be honest about the mistakes that were made, but do not take responsibility for things that weren't your fault. Explain what you can and cannot do in the situation. How how you can make uncontrollable issues actionable (e.g. bad weather made you cancel an event, but you'll monitor the weather and provide advance cancellation warnings)."

"I am the manager of City Bike Tours. I have examined our inventory and you are right. We are low in some of beach cruiser bikes. I'm sorry we disappointed you and I am happy to

report we have ordered additional bikes to make sure this never happens again."

Make it personal

If it makes sense, give contact info and ask for them to contact you directly. Indicate you want to resolve the issue offline and make things right. Use your name in your reply, introducing yourself so they understand they are talking to a real person.

Make it right

If you can offer a fix, do so. But be wary. There are some bad actors that will create reviews hoping to be offered something for free. A way to avoid this is to invite the reviewer to contact you directly so that you can try to make it right for them.

Ask for another chance

In many cases, you may want to invite the customer to re-engage with the business and give it a second chance. "In response to your suggestions, our hotel chef has added three delicious new vegan options to our lunch menu. I hope you will give us another opportunity to "wow" you!"

Don't delete a post

Even if the review is fake or offensive, and even if you have the power to delete, it is better to reply. If you believe the review is abusive or violates the review site's terms of service you can flag it, but if the reviewer is upset, remember they have many other places they can take their anger, along with screenshots to prove you have "something to hide."

Unless the review is truly offensive, it is better to diffuse the situation or politely point out what's happened and try to salvage things and nip them in the bud.

Ask for follow-up

If you make it right, and only if the reviewer validates this and seems to be happy, you may want to ask them offline to add to or amend their review to say they now feel differently about their overall experience.

Mind your brand name

Don't mention the brand name. In a bad review reply you don't want those negative reviews showing up in search results if they don't have to.

Universal Tips for All Reviews

Here are some pointers that refer to all kinds of reviews:

Respond quickly. According to Yelp, if you reply within 24 hours of review posting, you increase your chances of having a reviewer upgrade their review to a higher star rating by 33% within a day.

This mirrors a study Jay Baer talks about in his book, Hug Your Haters. Jay teamed up with Edison Research and found that 53% of customers expect a reply on review sites.

Businesses also experience a 16% boost in customer advocacy from answered complaints on reviews sites, that study found. Meanwhile, businesses that ignored complaints on review sites experiences a 37% decline in customer advocacy.

Be ethical and businesslike

Never pay anyone for a review. Never coerce, threaten, or try to unduly influence someone to write, delete or change a review. Never be abusive or threatening in response to a review or break terms of services.

Be succinct

Long responses that drag on for paragraphs, or — worse — are even longer than the actual review, will seem like you are being defensive and argumentative. Be short and sweet. Even if you want to respond point by point, force yourself to think of the big picture. You don't want to look petty, and that's what will happen, even if you're 100% in the right.

No boilerplate!

Be sure to customise your reply with specifics from the review. Formulas work (e.g: say thanks + reflect back what they said + invite them to re-engage), but boilerplate doesn't.

Posting the same reply over and over makes the company look robotic and impersonal and doesn't feel satisfying to reviewers. It's also boring to read, particularly when you reply to review after review on the same site.

Our Uberall research shows that more than 3 out of 4 people (78%) think a store's responses to reviews should be personalised to the review.

Public or private response?

If you don't see a pressing need to respond in public, you have other options. TripAdvisor, Yelp and many other social media and review sites allow the option of DM responses. The benefits to this are obvious. You can spare observers a lot of "Thanks for the great review!" posts and still show private gratitude to individual posters.

Or, you can delve into and get details on a negative experience without potentially your airing dirty laundry. (Which travel agency location was it exactly that closed early and was rude on the phone?) However, remember that public responses DO let other potential customers see your responsiveness in action, so don't be too covert. A bad review handled quietly may look to observers as if it was ignored entirely, which you don't want either. We think a combo of private and public responses is a powerful mix.

Think twice. Post once

Get a second set of eyes on your response before you hit "send." You can thank us later.

Optimise Your Online Reputation with a 'Near Me' Brand Experience

Customer reviews are one of the most important channels marketers for multi-location brands can use to optimise their online reputation and reach more nearby consumers. By tapping into the power of word-of-mouth reviews, your customers act as brand ambassadors that help you stay ahead of your competitors.

But reputation management can be a tricky business, because it also includes more than just managing your reviews. It also involves:

- Engaging with your customers where they are searching
- Having accurate online information about your offline products/services
- Making sure your in-store products/services line up with your online information/ promise
- Understanding the trends in negative customer reviews and making changes to make your service better
- Replying to both good and bad reviews

Although reviews are just one part of building a successful brand reputation online, it takes a total reputation management approach to improve reviews.

Consider the 'Near Me' Brand Experience when formulating your online reputation marketing strategy and offer your customers a compelling brand experience at the local location level.

So how should you proceed?

8 Tips to Building a 'Near Me' Brand Experience

1. It All Starts With Good Information

Accurate location is a trust indicator online. Is your address accurate and is your website listed? Can a customer call you or visit you when you say you will be open?

2. Reply to Both Bad and Good Reviews

A study by Mack Collier found that, of customers who received a response to their negative review, 33% changed their review to be more positive, while another 34% deleted their negative review entirely. Engagement matters.

3. Responding to Reviews Also Encourages Quality Reviews

One study found that customers are less likely to post negative reviews and are more likely to post more thoughtful negative reviews if they know that a business is likely to respond.

4. Encourage Customers to Give You Reviews

One way to ensure positive reviews is to encourage customers who already have a positive opinion of your brand to leave a review.

5. Consistent Brand Messaging Builds Trust

Are you consistent with how you reply to reviews on social media channels and search engines? Consistency helps a brand to be seen as professional, building trust and ensuring that customers view you as a customer first type of company.

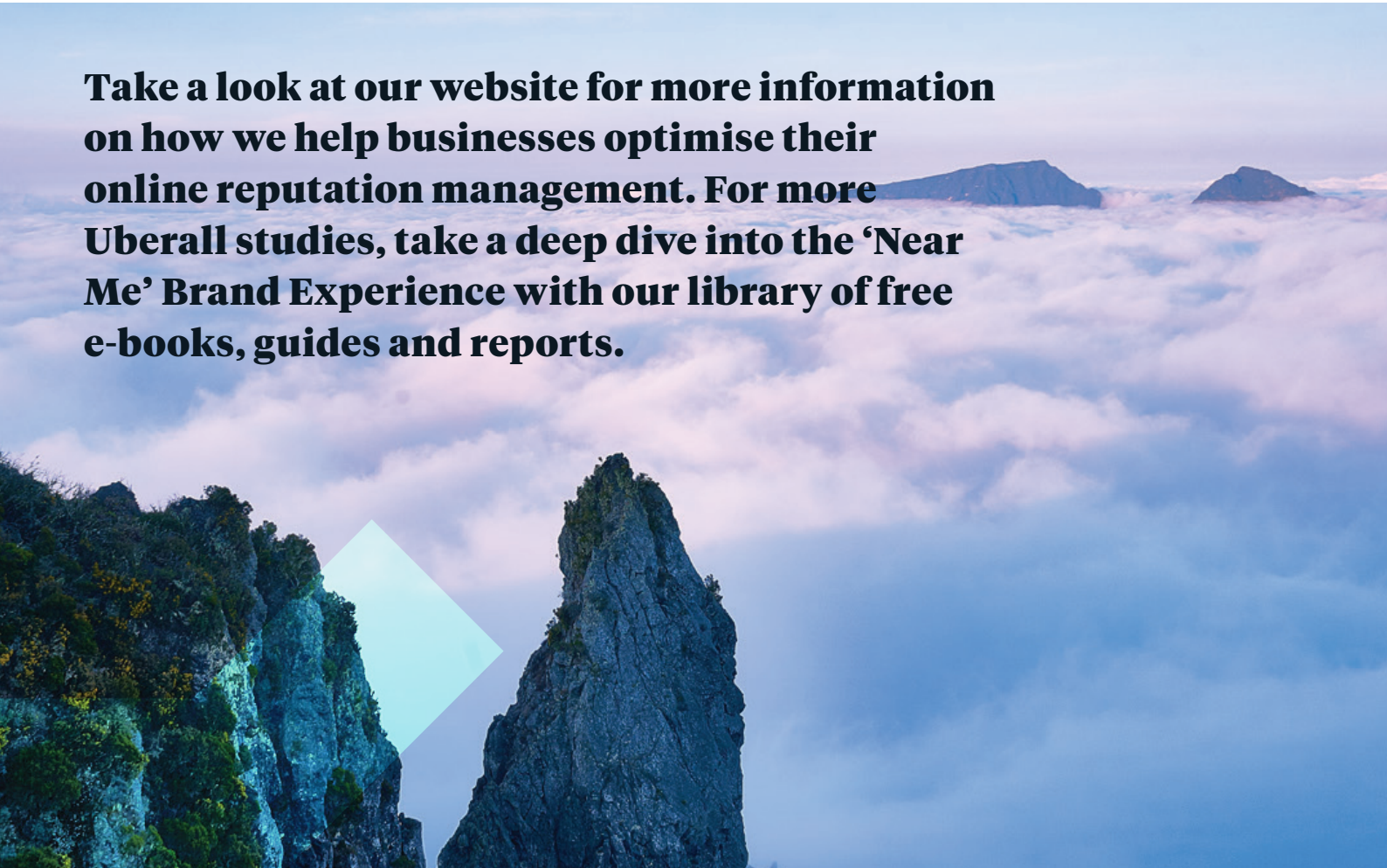**6. Prioritize Your GMB Profile**

Google's Q+A section allows you to respond to frequently asked 'near me' queries, which means that you will rank for more unbranded searches and get in front of more customers who are a good fit for your brand.

7. Don't Just Focus on GMB

Yelp appears in the top five search results for 92% of Google web queries that consist of a city and business category. To ignore Yelp is to ignore a massive chance to rank for local and organic search results.

8. Bury negative content below positive news stories/content

You can't control what people write about you online but you can bury it beneath a mountain of positive stories, reviews from other customers, testimonials etc.

Take a look at our website for more information on how we help businesses optimise their online reputation management. For more Uberall studies, take a deep dive into the 'Near Me' Brand Experience with our library of free e-books, guides and reports.

About Uberall

Enabling Your 'Near Me' Brand Experience Turn Online Interactions into Offline Sales

Uberall empowers some of the world's biggest brands to deliver a memorable 'Near Me' Brand Experience — from online interactions to offline sales. The 'Near Me' Brand Experience consists of all the online touchpoints that a consumer has with the local outlets of a brand, from finding, persuading, buying and recommending, to returning as a regular customer.

Uberall's solutions enable multi-location brands to easily manage search and discovery, engagement and conversion in real-time on all online platforms — mobile, voice and desktop — across websites, mobile apps, store locators, search engines, maps, social platforms and advertising networks.

Uberall is headquartered in Berlin, with additional offices in San Francisco, London, Paris, Amsterdam, and Cape Town. Its clients include Fortune 500 companies and industry leaders from all over the world.

Learn more at uberall.com

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