

Should you take your consumer gripe to the Better Business Bureau or Twitter?

22 June 2022, by Alexandra Skores



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Is the Better Business Bureau still relevant to consumers in an age of almost instant response on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram?

For more than 110 years, the bureau was built to create trust between consumers and businesses, and it still says its services are in demand. The North Central Texas bureau had over 4,295,021 inquiries on its website last year, with more than 62,353 complaints processed. Of those complaints, 90% were resolved.

But many young consumers simply go to Twitter, Instagram or other [social media](#) to publicly voice their complaints. Within seconds, their responses can be viewed by corporate social media teams monitoring traffic.

And some companies—even well-known ones—don't bother to join the BBB anymore.

Take a Texas favorite, Buc-ee's. The convenience store caught heat in April for racking up 100 BBB complaints since 2006—a seemingly small number given the thousands of people who stop every day

at the supersized [convenience store](#) and gas station chain's locations.

Yet the BBB puts a disclaimer on its site saying that Buc-ee's no longer responds to complaints filed with the agency that got its start in 1912.

"At the store level, our managers are empowered to make decisions," Jeff Nadalo, Buc-ee's general counsel, said in an email in April. "We choose not to mediate issues through the BBB or any other [social media platforms](#). As we have found out, most of the complaints on social media are false. We believe good old-fashioned face-to-face resolution is the best option for us."

The same goes for Dallas-based Southwest Airlines, which says it works directly with dissatisfied customers.

The carrier ranks a 1.14 out of five stars for [customer reviews](#) and gets an F rating on the Better Business Bureau website, and it has chosen to no longer be a member of the agency. "We do not respond back to customers through the BBB, as indicated on their website," a Southwest spokesperson said in an email. "Rather, we respond directly back to customers."

David Beasley, [vice president](#) and chief operating officer of the BBB in Dallas, says what differentiates the Better Business Bureau is its core services. It's a human first, technology second company whose dispute resolution services are conducted by actual people who verify whether the company treated the consumer fairly, Beasley said.

"You can scream into that black hole, but that company is not going to help you try to get a resolution for your problem," Beasley said. "So that's where the BBB has really kind of cornered the market and still being able to provide direct help to consumers."

The Better Business Bureau of North Central Texas employs over 45 people in its office on Elm Street, which serves 29 counties in Texas, 5.6 million consumers and 120,000 businesses. The base rate for a [business](#) to join the BBB is \$500 a year, according to Beasley. As a 501C-6 organization, the Better Business Bureau relies heavily on membership dues, which vary based on the size of the business.

The BBB's audience is consumers who reach a stage in life where they're "buying a house or a pool or a really expensive repair," Beasley said. "That's when whether or not a business is going to leave you high and dry becomes more and more important to you. So it's not a big shocker that an 18-year-old might not know what the Better Business Bureau is. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't pivot to meet the needs of the market."

Monica Horton, Better Business Bureau spokeswoman for North Central Texas, said that in an internal BBB agency study, 88% of consumers who had heard of BBB were more likely to purchase from a business that had an A+ or A rating.

She said the agency keeps close tabs on the complaints filed on its site. "We do our best to try and validate and verify that the one filing the review was actually a customer of the company," Horton said.

Scams are pretty common, and that has been a recent focus for the agency, she said.

Pivotal incident

Business professor Rajashri Srinivasan at the University of Texas at Austin says web complaints came into their own in 2009 with one pivotal incident.

That's when Dave Carroll, a Canadian musician, opened the case holding his Taylor guitar to find it completely demolished after an airline flight.

He complained to United Airlines, but nothing came of it, so Carroll posted a series of three videos on YouTube titled, "United Breaks Guitars" about his

damaged \$3,500 guitar. United Airlines reported a 10% loss of its market value at the time. And though there's no proof that the videos hurt United financially, they surely didn't help.

Srinivasan says social media really hadn't taken off before that as YouTube had just debuted in 2005. Yelp complaints and Google reviews were not the norm.

Now younger consumers generally look to Twitter, Instagram or even TikTok when they want to complain in real time, Srinivasan said. She said companies monitor social media through various ways and try to keep up with answering consumers' gripes.

"Social media is the new platform for consumer complaints," Srinivasan said. "The Better Business Bureau is sort of like previous-generation technology. It's not quite clear whether they will continue to be relevant in the next couple of years."

The BBB says it's not just for older consumers. In fact, online scams make it even more relevant, Horton said.

Many businesses in North Central Texas still rely on the agency, including Dallas-based AT&T, which has an A+ rating but only 1.11 out of five stars in the BBB's consumer rankings.

"Our mission at the Better Business Bureau is a marketplace where buyers and sellers can trust each other," Horton said. "That's our goal."

Arlington-based Six Flags Corp. has an A+ rating but has only 1.08 out of 5 stars for consumer reviews. The company has closed 1,282 complaints in the past three years, according to the BBB website.

Its main priority is to provide a safe and enjoyable experience, said Brad Malone, manager of marketing and communications of Six Flags Over Texas and Hurricane Harbor.

"The Better Business Bureau is one of the largest

third-party review sites, providing an outlet for our guests to submit valuable feedback," Malone said. "This also provides us with a neutral platform to address concerns directly with our guests."

And the BBB say it's targeting the newest generation of consumers. Horton said 15- to 24-year-olds are more susceptible to being scammed.

"The [senior citizens](#) are the ones people think because the losses are usually greater, but online purchase was our No. 1 scam, followed by cryptocurrency," Horton said. "These are all scams that are targeting that demographic."

Scams and false advertising are two areas the BBB cracks down on, Beasley said. The agency is also working with its search engine optimization and site traffic to ensure that consumers can see business ratings immediately when they look up a business.

"We make sure that our technology is to a point where once a consumer needs us, they're able to find us," Beasley said.

2022 The Dallas Morning News.

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

APA citation: Should you take your consumer gripe to the Better Business Bureau or Twitter? (2022, June 22) retrieved 6 July 2022 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2022-06-consumer-gripe-business-bureau-twitter.html>

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