USSSA · CIRCLE OF SUCCESS

REPUTATION BEFORE RESCUE

Building Trust Before You Need It. Proactive PR for Swim Schools.

Liane Caruso · Fractional CMO / Marketing Consultant, HelloCMO

ABOUT ME

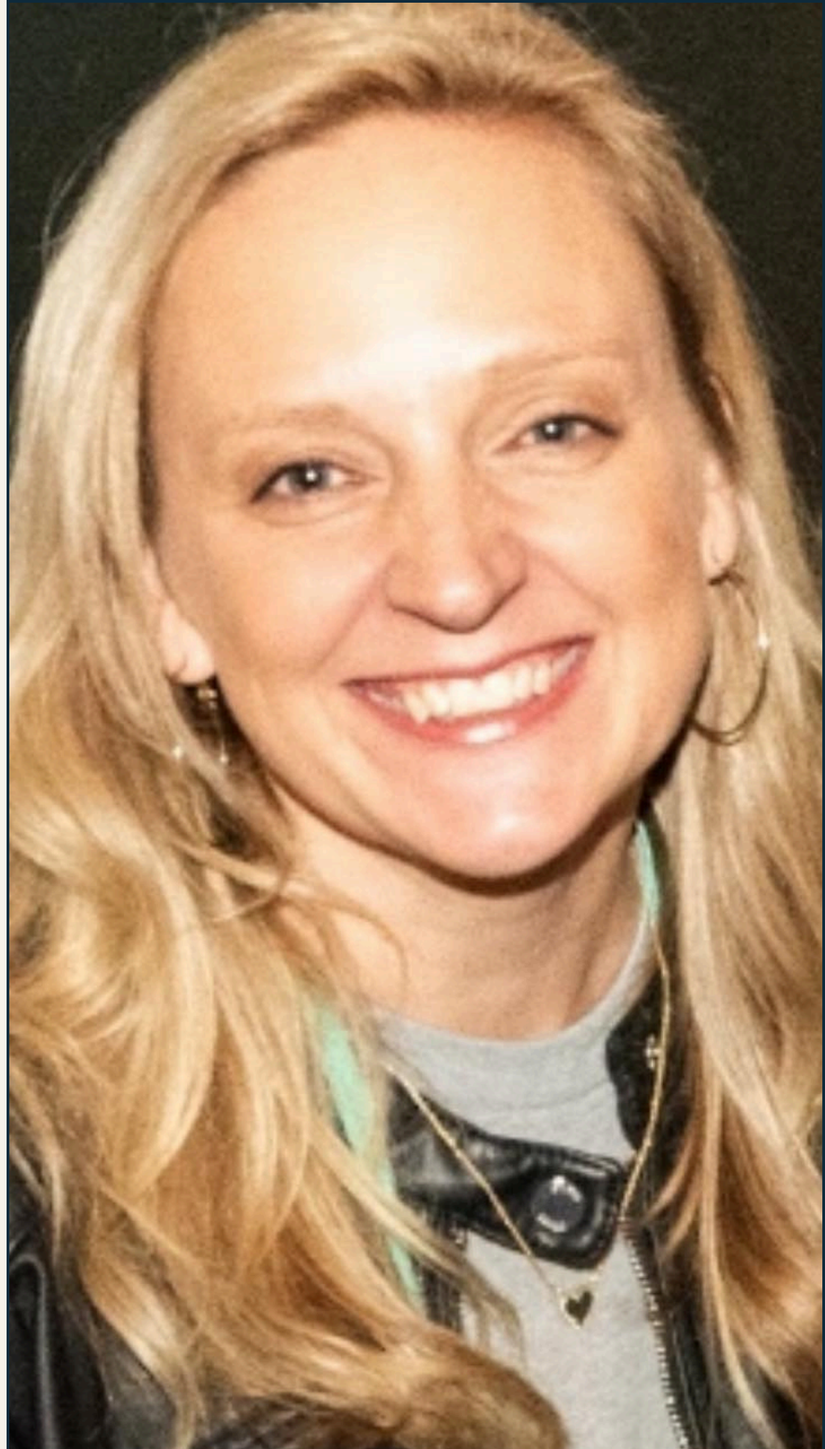
HI, I'M LIANE CARUSO

Fractional CMO & Marketing Consultant, HelloCMO

20+
years in marketing

100+
brands served

- 20+ years helping local, customer-facing businesses grow in their communities
- Strategic marketing for brands serving families, from swim lessons to tutoring to home care
- Worked with Watermelon Swim, so I know the swim school parent journey firsthand + my kids were students there!
- Built and sold my own marketing agency, so I've been a small business owner, too
- 2 kids, 2 dogs, 2 businesses



Every business is one post, one review, or one incident away from a reputation challenge.

The schools that weather it best built trust long before they needed it.

TODAY

WHERE WE'RE HEADED

PART 1

WHY REPUTATION MATTERS

PART 2

BUILD IT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

PART 3

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

PART 4

YOUR INSURANCE POLICY

You'll leave with a one-page plan you can start today!

01

WHY REPUTATION MATTERS

Trust is the currency every swim school runs on.

PART 1 · WHY REPUTATION MATTERS

TRUST IS YOUR REAL CURRENCY

Parents aren’t just buying swim lessons. They’re trusting you with their child’s safety.

They choose you on trust
Referrals, reviews, and what other parents say at pickup.

They stay because of trust
Consistent, safe, caring lessons week after week.

They forgive because of trust
When something goes wrong, trust buys you time to fix it.

PART 1 · WHY REPUTATION MATTERS

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Same post, two schools: *"My daughter slipped in the water and the instructor didn’t notice immediately."*

School A: known and trusted

Other parents reply: "They've been amazing with our kids. I'm sure they'll look into it."

School B: quiet and unknown

Other parents reply: "Wow. Glad we didn't sign up there."

Your reputation decides how people fill in the gaps before you've said a word.

PART 1 · WHY REPUTATION MATTERS

STRONG REPUTATIONS RECOVER

Tylenol, 1982
After tampered capsules caused deaths in the Chicago area, Johnson & Johnson pulled the product nationwide and introduced tamper-evident packaging. Deep trust helped the brand come back.

Domino's, 2009
Two employees posted a disgusting prank video. The CEO answered with his own video apology within days and a public plan to fix it.

Watermelon Swim, Sept 2026
A construction update for a new location drew traffic, tree and "just a money grab" complaints. Watermelon Swim answered questions with facts, and community members stepped in to defend them. Fifty years of trust in the bank, paying off in real time.

The common thread: they moved fast, owned it, and had trust in the bank.

WATERMELON SWIM · ZEPHYRHILLS, FL · HAPPENING NOW

TRUST IN REAL TIME

WHAT HAPPENED

A construction update for their 6th indoor location drew 69 comments about traffic, lost trees, and water use.

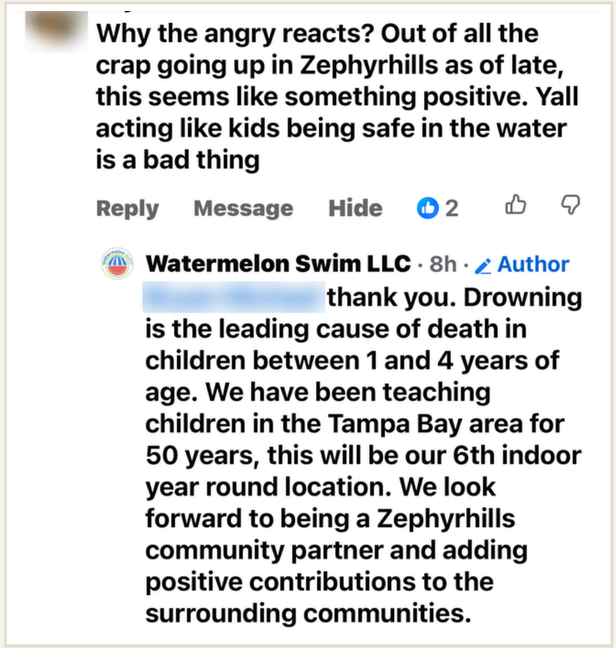
WHAT THEY DID

- Answered real questions fast, with facts
- Thanked supporters, restated the mission
- Hid abuse, left real concerns up

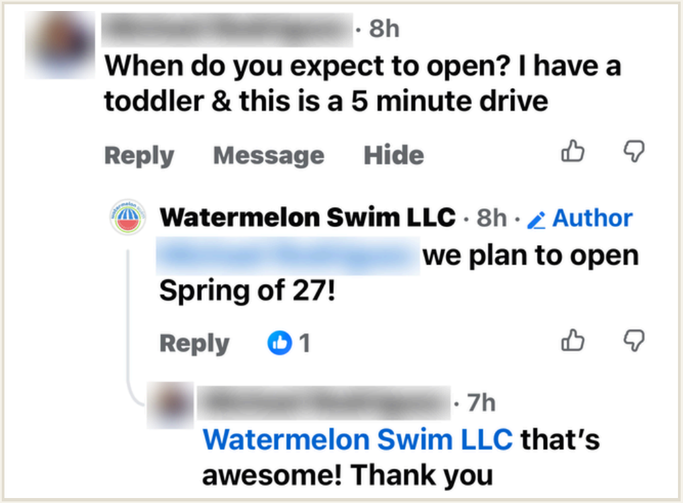
WHAT 50 YEARS OF TRUST DID

Neighbors stepped in to defend them, without being asked.

THANKING A DEFENDER



ANSWERING WITH FACTS



THE SITE



02

BUILD IT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

The Trust Bank Account: every interaction is a deposit or a withdrawal.

PART 2 · BUILD IT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

THE TRUST BANK ACCOUNT

DEPOSITS

- Exceptional lesson experiences
- Consistent, proactive communication
- Celebrating student wins
- Community partnerships and giving back
- Staff who love where they work
- Reviews and testimonials

WITHDRAWALS

- Slow replies to parents
- Inconsistent instructors or schedules
- Surprise policy or price changes
- Ignoring or arguing with reviews
- A front desk that's rushed or cold

PART 2 · BUILD IT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

DEPOSITS START IN THE POOL

Exceptional experiences
Warm greetings, clean facilities, and instructors who know every child's name.

Consistent communication
Progress updates, reminders, and a heads-up before anything changes.

Celebrate every milestone
First float, first lap, level-ups. Make the moment easy for parents to share.

Ask yourself: what does a parent feel in the first five minutes at your front desk?

PART 2 · BUILD IT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

SHOW UP BEYOND THE POOL

Free water safety days
Open the pool to the community before summer starts.

Local partnerships
Pediatricians, schools, daycares, and first responders.

Support local causes
Sponsor teams, host fundraisers, show up at events.

Be the water safety expert
Local news, parent newsletters, and Water Safety Month in May.

Aim to be known as the water safety expert, not just a lesson provider.

PART 2 · BUILD IT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

YOUR STAFF ARE YOUR BRAND

Most parents experience your brand through an instructor.

- Train **everyone** on your key messages
- Give instructors words for tough parent questions
- Recognize staff publicly, and let them share it
- Happy staff show up in reviews, and so do unhappy ones







PART 2 · BUILD IT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

TURN PARENTS INTO AMBASSADORS

01

Delight

Create a moment worth talking about.

02

Ask

Request a review on a high day, like a level-up. Never with the bill.

03

Make it easy

QR code at the front desk and a link in progress emails.

04

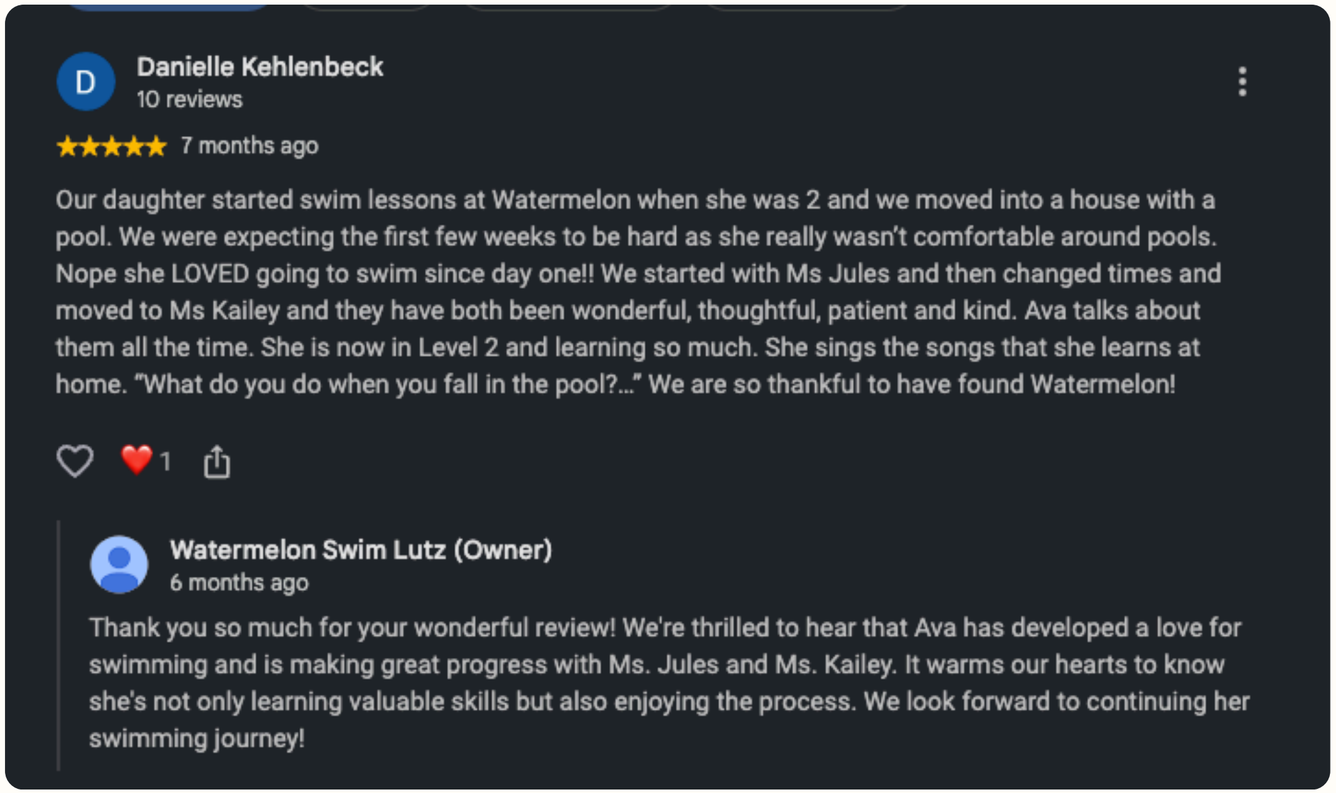
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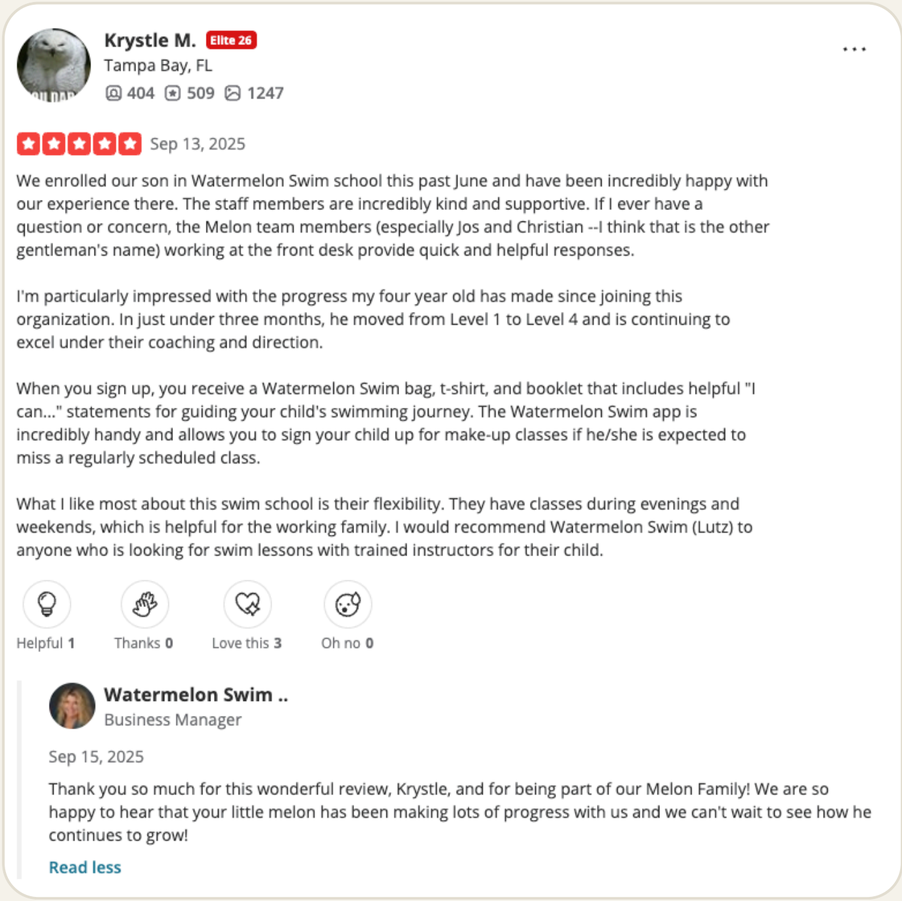
Respond to every review, the good ones too.

Happy parents rarely post on their own. Unhappy parents always do. Ask.

PART 2 · BUILD IT BEFORE YOU NEED IT

SAMPLE GOOGLE REVIEWS





03

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

You can't control every situation. You can control how you respond.

PART 3 · WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

IT WILL HAPPEN TO SOMEONE HERE

A negative review goes viral

A safety incident or misunderstanding

Parent complaints on social media

A staff mistake

Misinformation spreading online

Which one keeps you up at night?

STEP 1: DOES IT NEED A PUBLIC REPLY?

RESPOND PUBLICLY

- It involves safety
- It's spreading or drawing engagement
- It contains a factual error others will believe
- A parent is clearly asking for help

HANDLE PRIVATELY OR LET IT GO

- A single vent with no traction
- Someone trolling in bad faith
- A reply would expose details about a child or family

PART 3 · WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

THE RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

1 **Respond quickly**
Within hours, even if it's only "we're looking into this."

2 **Lead with empathy**
Acknowledge the feeling before the facts.

3 **Take it offline**
Offer a real name and a direct phone number.

4 **Facts, not emotions**
Share what you know. Don't guess or get defensive.

5 **Share your actions**
Tell people what you're doing about it.

6 **Close the loop**
Follow up privately, and publicly when it helps.

PART 3 · WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

WHAT A GOOD REPLY SOUNDS LIKE

2 OF 5 STARS

"Waited 20 minutes for our lesson to start and nobody told us why. Not impressed."

Hi [Parent], thank you for telling us, and I'm sorry. Waiting without an update is frustrating, especially with a little one ready to swim. That's on us. We were short an instructor that evening, and we've since added a backup to every shift. I'd love to make it right, so please call me directly at [phone]. [Your name], Owner

Empathy · Ownership · Facts · Action · Offline

PART 3 · WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

SAFETY INCIDENTS NEED THEIR OWN PLAYBOOK

- Care for the child and family first.
- Loop in your insurer and legal counsel before any public statement.
- Protect privacy. Never name a child or share details publicly.
- Tell staff what happened and who speaks for the school.
- Reach other families first if they'll hear about it anyway.

The framework still applies, but a safety incident moves slower and more carefully.

04

YOUR REPUTATION INSURANCE POLICY

Answer five questions now, on a calm day, so you're not deciding in a crisis.

PART 4 · YOUR INSURANCE POLICY

BUILD YOUR PLAN TODAY

Question	Your answer
Who speaks for the school?	
Which situations need a response?	
Who monitors reviews and social media, and how often?	
What are our three key messages?	
How do we reach parents fast during an issue?	

BUILD TRUST BEFORE YOU NEED IT.

Every interaction is a deposit. Make enough of them, and your community will give you the benefit of the doubt.



THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?

Liane Caruso
liane@lianecaruso.com
hello-cmo.com
Find Me on LinkedIn!