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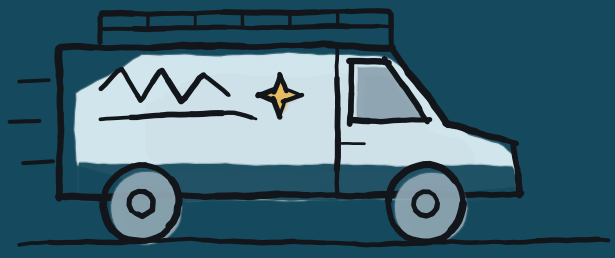
a free guide

What 55,000 reviews say about local trades

We studied 55,042 Google reviews of 265 roofers, landscapers, plumbers, HVAC companies, house cleaners and painters in 10 Southeast cities. Here's what angry and happy customers write about, and how owners answer them.

For owners, trade groups and local press.

- 18 short sections in 7 parts
- 50 things you can do in the next 24 hours
- An example in every section
- Sources for every figure



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Before you start

Every local trade owner reads their bad reviews. Few get to read 55,000 of them. So we did: every review we could pull for 265 established local businesses across six trades, tagged by topic, to see what separates a 1-star review from a 5-star one.

In November 2026 we picked businesses from Google Maps in 10 Southeast cities: Nashville, Tulsa, Louisville, Huntsville, Lexington, Birmingham, Memphis, Little Rock, Montgomery and Jackson, Mississippi. In each city and trade we took two from the map's top 3, two from spots 4 to 20 and one from below 20. That gave 265 businesses and 55,042 reviews, 45,059 of them with text. We tagged 14 topics in every review with text, and checked the tags by reading 1,200 reviews by hand.

The headline findings:

- **Money is in most bad reviews.** Price, quotes and billing came up in 62.6% of 1- and 2-star reviews and 15.4% of 5-star ones.
- **Payment and refunds is the most lopsided topic.** It came up in 14.7% of bad reviews and 1.0% of 5-star ones.
- **Waiting and silence come next.** Scheduling came up in 44.1% of bad reviews, and communication in 32.3%.
- **Happy customers write about people.** The crew or staff came up in 49.5% of 5-star reviews, and 38.5% named a staff member.
- **Bad reviews are rare and long.** Only 3.8% of recent reviews were 1 or 2 stars. The typical one ran 92 words. The typical 5-star review ran 26.
- **Owners answer good reviews more than bad ones.** In our reply sample, owners replied to 82% of 4- and 5-star reviews and 63% of 1- and 2-star ones.
- **Replies are slow.** The typical reply came 20 days after the review. Only 20.5% came within a week.

Part 1 covers what angry customers write about. Part 2 covers happy ones. Part 3 goes trade by trade. Part 4 shows what reviews look like, Part 5 how owners reply, and Part 6 what to do with it. Part 7 has the method and its limits.

How to read the numbers:

- **"Share of bad reviews"** means the share of 1- and 2-star reviews with text that mention a topic. **"Share of 5-star reviews"** is the same for 5-star reviews. We pulled extra bad reviews on purpose so we'd have enough to study, so we never give a share "of all reviews."
- A topic counts when a review talks about it. In a bad review that's almost always a complaint. In a 5-star review it's praise.

Two rules we kept while writing it:

- Every figure about these businesses comes from our own study, cited as "GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026." Survey figures and Google's rules are cited from their own pages. When we give our opinion, we say "GTL estimate" and tell you why we think it.

- We never name a business, a reviewer or a staff member. Where we show what customers say, it's our own paraphrase of a pattern we saw many times, never a real review. Every example is made up.



Part 1

What angry customers write about

1 Money is in most bad reviews

The idea. Price, quotes and value came up in 62.6% of bad reviews and 15.4% of 5-star ones, about four times as often (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026). It was the top complaint in all six trades.

"Price" here means the review talks about money. It includes fees, quotes, refunds and billing, not only "too expensive." Most of these reviews aren't about a high price. They're about a surprise: a fee nobody mentioned, a bill above the quote, a charge for a fix that didn't hold.

What we read most often, in our own words:

- **Paraphrase, not a real review:** Was charged a service fee just for the visit, then quoted far more than other companies for the same repair.
- **Paraphrase, not a real review:** The final bill came in well above the quote with no warning.
- **Paraphrase, not a real review:** Paid for a fix that did not last and was charged again to come back.

And the 5-star version:

- **Paraphrase, not a real review:** Gave a clear price up front and the bill matched it.
- **Paraphrase, not a real review:** Fair price, and they suggested a cheaper repair instead of a replacement.

Among the words most typical of 1-star reviews were money, charge, paid, charged, pay, fee and quoted.

Example. A made-up plumber adds one line to every phone call: the service fee, and "you'll get the price before we start." That one line targets the most common topic in their trade's bad reviews.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Read your own bad reviews and count how many mention money.
- [ ] Write down every fee or extra a customer could be surprised by.
- [ ] Decide where each one gets said: on the phone, on the quote, or both.

2 The topics happy customers almost never mention

The idea. Some topics show up in bad reviews far more than in good ones. When a review mentions one of these, it's almost always bad (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026):

Topic	Share of bad reviews	Share of 5-star reviews	Times more common in bad reviews
Payment, deposits and refunds	14.7%	1.0%	14.7
Damage to the property	3.9%	0.3%	13.0
Warranty	8.0%	1.0%	8.0
Price, quotes and value	62.6%	15.4%	4.1
Honesty, trust and sales pressure	21.6%	6.5%	3.3
Follow-through and reliability	14.2%	6.2%	2.3

Payment and refunds is the clearest. Customers almost never praise your billing. They complain when they're charged after cancelling or wait for a refund.

Paraphrase, not a real review: Kept charging the card after the service was cancelled.

Paraphrase, not a real review: Felt pushed to replace the whole system when only a small part was needed.

Paraphrase, not a real review: Said they would come back to finish and never did.

Our tags catch damage poorly, so its real share is likely higher than 3.9%.

Example. A made-up house cleaning company writes a one-page money policy: when they charge, how to cancel, what a lockout costs. It goes out with every booking. The topic that came up in a fifth of their trade's bad reviews now has an answer in writing.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Write your cancellation and refund rule in one paragraph.
- [ ] Write your warranty in one sentence.
- [ ] Check for any refund you owe or any charge after a cancellation, and fix it today.

3 Waiting and silence

The idea. After money, the biggest complaints are about time and contact. Scheduling, availability and speed came up in 44.1% of bad reviews. Communication came up in 32.3%, and showing up on time in 17.5% (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026).

Among the words most typical of 1-star reviews were called, never, call, phone, calls, appointment, later, tried and times. The story they tell: the customer called, nobody called back, and the appointment came late or not at all.

Paraphrase, not a real review: Left several messages and nobody ever called back.

Paraphrase, not a real review: Took a day off work for the appointment window and they cancelled at the last minute.

Paraphrase, not a real review: No call or text to say the tech was running hours late.

Speed is also praise. Scheduling came up in 28.3% of 5-star reviews, and communication in 15.4%. Same-day service and an on-my-way text earn their own reviews.

Paraphrase, not a real review: Texted before arriving and kept us updated the whole way through.

Example. A made-up HVAC company saves two texts on the dispatch phone: "running late, new time" and "can't make it today, here's the first slot." Nobody waits past their window without hearing from them.

Do it in 24 hours

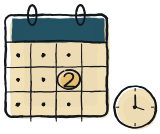
- [ ] Turn on a missed-call text on your business phone.
- [ ] Save a running-late text and a can't-make-it text.
- [ ] Pick one person to return every call and text before the end of each day.

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Part 2

What happy customers write about

4 People and the work

The idea. Here's what 5-star reviews talk about most, across all six trades (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026):

Topic	Share of 5-star reviews	Share of bad reviews
Crew and staff behavior	49.5%	26.8%
Quality of the work	47.4%	19.0%
Scheduling, availability and speed	28.3%	44.1%
Know-how and explaining the work	22.9%	18.5%
Communication	15.4%	32.3%
Price, quotes and value	15.4%	62.6%

Crew and quality are the two topics that show up much more in good reviews than bad ones. Happy customers write about the person who came and what the work looks like. Among the words most typical of 5-star reviews were professional, team, friendly, knowledgeable, thorough, helpful and questions.

Paraphrase, not a real review: Polite, friendly and professional from start to finish.

Paraphrase, not a real review: Explained the problem in plain words and showed photos of what they found.

Example. A made-up roofer reads their 5-star reviews and finds the crew lead's arrival routine mentioned again and again. They write it down and teach it to every new crew lead.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Read your last 20 five-star reviews and note what they praise.
- [ ] Write down the habit behind the praise (an arrival routine, a walk-through, a photo).
- [ ] Teach that habit to everyone who meets customers.

5 Many 5-star reviews name a staff member, so earn it

The idea. 38.5% of 5-star reviews with text named a staff member by first name. That fell to 25.2% of 4-star reviews, 19.4% of 3-star ones and 13.1% of 1- and 2-star ones. Across all reviews with text, it was 33.9% (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026). When a review

names someone, it's usually a happy one.

Don't ask for it. Google's review rules ban asking customers for reviews with specific content, including content that names a staff member. They also ban review quotas for staff, incentives for reviews, and asking only happy customers (Google Maps user-contributed content policy, support.google.com).

So earn it. Customers name the people they met, who told them their name and explained the work. That means:

- Introduce yourself by name at the door.
- Send the worker's name, and a photo, in the on-my-way text.
- Keep the same crew or cleaner on the same customer where you can.
- Ask every customer for an honest review, with no words or names requested.

Example. A made-up cleaning company sends "[cleaner names] will be at your home tomorrow" the day before every clean. Nobody asks for names. Clients learn them anyway, and some use them in reviews.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Read your review request text. Remove any line that asks for a name or specific words.
- [ ] Add the worker's first name to your on-my-way or day-before text.
- [ ] Remove any staff review target or bonus.

6 The words customers use, for your website and ads

The idea. These were the words most typical of 5-star reviews and of 1-star reviews, across all six trades, once common words, names and business names were removed (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026):

Most typical of 5-star reviews	Most typical of 1-star reviews
great, professional, recommend, team, excellent, friendly, knowledgeable, crew, process, thorough, quickly, helpful, questions, quality	called, never, someone, money, charge, paid, charged, phone, appointment, months, times, fee, quoted, instead

The 5-star list describes people and a process. The 1-star list describes a phone that wasn't answered and a bill that wasn't expected.

Don't paste the 5-star words onto your website. Every competitor already says "professional." Show the proof behind each word, and answer the 1-star words head on:

- **"Process":** your steps, in order, on your website.
- **"Questions":** the five you get most, with plain answers.
- **"Quickly":** your real reply time and booking lead time.
- **Against "fee" and "quoted":** your fees on the website, and "price before we start."

- **Against "called" and "never":** "We answer every call and text the same day."

Each trade guide below has its own word lists.

Example. A made-up painter replaces "Professional, high-quality painting" with "We walk every room with you and fix every spot before we leave." It's a promise the 5-star reviews describe and the 1-star reviews say was missing.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Cross out every adjective on your homepage a competitor could also use.
- [ ] Replace each one with a fact, a step or a photo.
- [ ] Add one line that answers your trade's top 1-star worry.

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Part 3

Trade by trade

7 The complaints, trade by trade

The idea. Money was the top complaint in every trade. What comes second, and how much money dominates, differs (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026):

Trade	Bad reviews mentioning price	Second complaint	Most lopsided topic
Plumbers	69.5%	Scheduling, 43.4%	Insurance claims (2.3% of bad, 0.1% of 5-star)
HVAC	69.1%	Scheduling, 48.2%	Damage (3.3% vs 0.2%)
House cleaners	58.8%	Scheduling, 44.5%	Payment and refunds (21.5% vs 0.2%)
Roofers	56.1%	Communication, 44.4%	Payment and refunds (17.9% vs 1.9%)
Painters	51.8%	Quality, 47.2%	Payment and refunds (20.0% vs 1.4%)
Landscapers	45.6%	Scheduling, 39.5%	Payment and refunds (16.7% vs 0.6%)

A few things stand out:

- **Plumbing and HVAC** are the trades where money is most often the complaint, and HVAC leads on honesty and sales pressure (25.6% of bad reviews) and warranty (12.1%).
- **Roofers** lead on communication complaints (44.4%). Long jobs with weather delays leave long gaps.
- **House cleaners** lead on payment and refund complaints (21.5%).
- **Painters** are the one trade where quality is the second complaint (47.2%). The customer sees every missed spot.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Find your trade's row.
- [ ] Open your trade's guide (links below) and read the section on its top two complaints.
- [ ] Pick one fix and start it tomorrow.

8 The praise, trade by trade

The idea. Happy customers praise different things in different trades (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026):

Trade	Top praise in 5-star reviews	Second	5-star reviews naming a staff member
Painters	Quality, 69.9%	Crew, 53.2%	30.8%
House cleaners	Quality, 64.7%	Staff, 37.5%	37.5%
Plumbers	Staff, 57.9%	Know-how, 35.4%	38.9%
HVAC	Staff, 56.5%	Know-how, 39.9%	42.3%
Roofers	Crew, 48.9%	Quality, 48.5%	43.8%
Landscapers	Quality, 47.3%	Crew, 39.1%	32.7%

Where the work is visible (painting, cleaning, landscaping), customers praise the result. Where it's hidden behind a wall or inside a unit (plumbing, HVAC), they praise the person and how well they explained it. Roofing sits in between.

Two more trade findings:

- **Painters** get the most price praise: 30.1% of 5-star painting reviews mention price, mostly as a fair estimate that matched the bill.
- **Roofers** get the most cleanup and insurance praise: 15.0% and 11.6% of 5-star roofing reviews.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Find your trade's row.
- [ ] Check your homepage leads with your trade's top praise, shown with proof.
- [ ] Add one photo or one step that shows your trade's second praise.

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Part 4

What reviews look like

9 Bad reviews are rare, so each one stands out

The idea. Among the newest reviews for these businesses, 92.8% were 5 stars, 2.6% were 4 stars, 0.7% were 3 stars and 3.8% were 1 or 2 stars (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026). Bad reviews are a small share of what customers write. That's why each one gets read closely.

Businesses lower on the map had a higher share. Among businesses below spot 20, 5.9% of recent reviews were 1 or 2 stars, against 3.9% in the top 3 and 3.1% in spots 4 to 20. That's a pattern, not proof that bad reviews push a business down the map. Google says its local ranking depends on relevance, distance and prominence, and that more reviews and positive ratings can help (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com).

By trade, the share of recent reviews at 1 or 2 stars ranged from 2.3% for painters to 5.8% for landscapers.

Example. A made-up landscaper has 120 reviews, and five are 1 or 2 stars. Each of those five sits on the profile for years, and each is long (section 10). The owner replies to all five with a specific fix, so the next customer reads the fix along with the complaint.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Count your 1- and 2-star reviews, and work out what share of your reviews they are.
- [ ] Check every one has a reply.
- [ ] Reply to the ones that don't, oldest first.

10 Angry reviews are long, happy ones are short

The idea. The typical 1- or 2-star review ran 92 words. The typical 3-star review ran 56, the typical 4-star 29, and the typical 5-star 26 (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026). 18.0% of 5-star reviews had no text at all, and 29.1% of 4-star ones.

So a bad review is a story with dates, amounts and names. A reply that doesn't answer the story tells the next reader you didn't read it. In BrightLocal's 2026 survey, 50% of consumers said generic or templated replies put them off (BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026, brightlocal.com).

The fix is a four-part reply: thank them and name the specific problem; own what's fair; say what you're doing about it, with a date; take it offline with a name and number. How to Answer a Bad Review has replies for the six most common cases.

Example. A made-up reply to a 92-word review about a service fee and an unreturned call:

> **Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry. You weren't told about the service fee when you booked, and then nobody called you back. Both are on us. We now say the fee on every call. I'd like to make this right. I'll call you today. [your name], owner**

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Reread your last bad review and list every specific complaint in it.
- [ ] Check your reply answers each one, or rewrite it with the four parts.
- [ ] Never mention a customer's address, bill amount or private details in a reply.



Part 5

How owners reply

11 Owners reply to good reviews more than bad ones

The idea. In our reply sample, owners replied to 81.7% of 4- and 5-star reviews but 63.0% of 1- and 2-star ones. For 1-star reviews alone it was 61.0% (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026).

Stars	Share with an owner reply
5 stars	81.8%
4 stars	80.8%
3 stars	69.6%
2 stars	71.1%
1 star	61.0%

That's backwards. The bad review is the one the next customer reads most closely, and the one where your reply matters most. In BrightLocal's 2026 survey, 89% of consumers said they expect owners to respond to reviews, and 42% said they're unlikely to use a business that never replies (BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026, brightlocal.com).

Most owners do reply to something: 85.3% of the businesses replied to at least half the reviews we checked, and 57.0% replied to 90% or more. Only 2.6% replied to none.

Example. A made-up HVAC owner thanks every 5-star review within a day, but leaves the 1-star ones for "when I have time to think." They switch the order: bad reviews first, the same day, after a call.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Count your unanswered 1-, 2- and 3-star reviews.
- [ ] Reply to every one, oldest first.
- [ ] From today, answer bad reviews before good ones.

12 The typical reply takes 20 days

The idea. The typical owner reply came 20 days after the review. Only 20.5% of replies came within a week (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026).

Customers expect much faster. In BrightLocal's 2026 survey, 81% of consumers said they expect a reply within a week, and 19% expect one the same day (BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026, brightlocal.com).

Speed matters for a second reason. Google tells the reviewer when you reply, and the reviewer can still edit their review afterwards (Google Business Profile Help, support.google.com). A fast, fair reply, with a call and a fix, reaches the customer while they're still deciding how they feel.

GTL estimate: replying to bad reviews within one business day is the cheapest review fix there is. Our reasoning: it costs 15 minutes, almost four in five replies in our sample took longer than a week, and four in five customers expect an answer inside one.

Example. A made-up painter turns on review alerts and blocks 15 minutes at the end of each day. Their typical reply time drops from weeks to hours.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Turn on review alerts in your Google profile, so new reviews reach your phone.
- [ ] Put a daily 15-minute reply slot on your calendar.
- [ ] Decide who replies when you're on a job, and what they can say.

13 Replies trade by trade

The idea. Reply habits differ a lot by trade (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026):

Trade	Reply rate, 5-star	Reply rate, 1- and 2-star	Typical days to reply	Replies within a week
Roofers	91.3%	68.0%	23	17.0%
Plumbers	88.7%	66.1%	12	31.5%
House cleaners	79.1%	65.3%	26	15.6%
Painters	79.5%	61.0%	45	10.9%
HVAC	78.9%	53.7%	14	27.0%
Landscapers	70.2%	65.3%	24	16.3%

Plumbers reply fastest. Painters are slowest, with a typical wait of 45 days. HVAC companies answer the fewest bad reviews: about half. The bad-review counts behind each trade's rate are small (from 41 for painters to 303 for landscapers), so read those as rough.

By map position, businesses in the top 3 replied to 76.5% of the reviews we checked, against 83.0% in spots 4 to 20 and 83.5% below 20. That's directional, and it doesn't mean replying less helps. Top-3 businesses tend to have far more reviews to keep up with.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Find your trade's row, and work out your own reply rate on your last 20 reviews.
- [ ] If you're below your trade's row, reply to every unanswered review this week.
- [ ] If you're above it, work on speed: aim for one business day.

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Part 6

What this means for an owner

14 Five fixes that hit the biggest complaints

The idea. Put the findings together and five fixes cover most of what fills bad reviews in these six trades. Each trade guide has the full version, with scripts and templates for that trade.

1. **Price in writing before the work.** Say every fee on the phone. List every likely extra, with its price, on the quote. Get a yes before you start. (Money: 62.6% of bad reviews.)
2. **A text at every step.** On my way, running late, end of the day, job done. (Scheduling: 44.1%. Communication: 32.3%.)
3. **Money rules on one page.** Deposits, cancelling, refunds, renewals, in plain words. (Payment and refunds: 14.7% of bad reviews, 1.0% of good.)
4. **A written warranty and a check-in.** One sentence on every invoice, and a text a few days or weeks later. (Warranty: 8.0%. Follow-through: 14.2%.)
5. **A specific reply within a day.** Bad reviews first, with the four parts from section 10. (Owners replied to 63.0% of bad reviews, and the typical reply took 20 days.)

All figures: GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026.

Example. A made-up roofer does one fix a week for five weeks, in this order. By the sixth week, the office gets fewer "where are you?" calls, and the next bad review gets a reply the same afternoon.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Pick the fix that matches your own top complaint (section 15).
- [ ] Open your trade's guide and copy its script or template for that fix.
- [ ] Start it on your next job.

15 Run the same check on your own reviews

The idea. Our numbers are averages across 265 businesses. Yours will be different, and yours are the ones that count. In 20 minutes you can run the same check on your own profile.

The audit (a sheet of paper is enough):

1. Write the 14 topics down the side: crew and staff, quality, scheduling and speed, on time, communication, price, follow-through, honesty, payment and refunds, warranty, know-how, cleanup, damage, insurance claims.
2. Read your last 30 reviews, plus every 1-, 2- and 3-star review you have.

3. Mark each topic a review talks about. Use one column for 5-star and one for the rest.
4. Circle the topic with the most marks in the bad column. That's your first fix.
5. Circle the topic with the most marks in the 5-star column. Put proof of it on your website.

Example. A made-up house cleaner runs the audit. Quality is in most of their 5-star reviews, and payment is in three of their four bad ones. They start with the money policy in their trade's guide.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Run the audit tonight.
- [ ] Open your trade's guide at the section for your top complaint.
- [ ] Put a reminder to run it again in 90 days.

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Part 7

How we did it

16 What we collected

The idea. These are the facts behind every number in this report.

- **When:** November 2026.
- **Where:** 10 cities in the US Southeast: Nashville, Tulsa, Louisville, Huntsville, Lexington, Birmingham, Memphis, Little Rock, Montgomery and Jackson, Mississippi.
- **Which businesses:** from our Google Maps results in each city, for each of six trades, the two most-reviewed in the map's top 3, the two most-reviewed in spots 4 to 20, and one below spot 20. We picked 298, then dropped 33 whose Google category wasn't the trade (such as paint-and-sip studios, pest control and carpet cleaners). That left 265: 50 roofers, 48 landscapers, 47 plumbers, 48 HVAC companies, 39 house cleaners and 33 painters. 119 were from the top 3, 110 from spots 4 to 20 and 36 from below 20.
- **Which reviews:** for each business, the newest 180 Google reviews plus the 70 with the fewest stars, or every review if it had fewer than 250. That's 55,042 reviews: 6,167 at 1 star, 1,437 at 2, 1,044 at 3, 2,836 at 4 and 43,558 at 5. 45,059 have text: 6,502 bad ones and 35,736 at 5 stars.
- **Owner replies:** the first 50 reviews per business in Google's "most relevant" order, 13,197 reviews in all, 1,037 of them 1 or 2 stars.
- **What we counted:** 14 topics in every review with text, review length, whether a staff member's first name appears, the words most typical of 5-star and 1-star reviews, and owner reply rates and timing.

We report totals only. We stored no reviewer names, photos or business names, and we never name a business, reviewer or staff member.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Pick your trade from the list above and open its guide.
- [ ] Run the same count on your own reviews (section 15).

17 How we checked the tags

The idea. A computer tagged the topics using a dictionary of word patterns. To see how often it was right, we read 1,200 reviews by hand, 200 per trade, and compared. On the 1,100 we hadn't used to build the dictionary, 96.2% of the tags were right, and the tags caught 90.6% of the topics a person reading would spot. Every tag on a review was right for 76.8% of reviews (GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026).

Trade	Tags that were right	Topics the tags caught
Plumbers	98.0%	93.9%
HVAC	97.9%	93.0%
Roofers	97.7%	93.0%
Painters	96.5%	93.9%
House cleaners	94.4%	86.6%
Landscapers	91.7%	82.4%

The weak spots:

- **Damage:** the tags caught 60% of damage stories, from only 15 true cases. Treat damage shares as a floor.
- **Honesty:** 84.4% of tags right, 83.3% caught.
- **Communication** (82.0% caught) and **quality** (85.0% caught) are undercounted most among the big topics.
- **Landscaping** is the hardest trade, because lawn praise like "the yard looks lush" slips past word patterns.

So every share in this report runs slightly low, and the true picture is a little stronger than what we show.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] When you run your own audit, read every review yourself. You'll catch what a word list misses.

18 The limits, and how to quote this report

The idea. This is a careful count, not a scientific survey. Keep these limits in mind:

- **Southeast only.** Ten mid-size and large cities in one region. Other regions may look different.
- **Businesses that rank on Maps.** We picked established businesses that show up in Google Maps results, weighted toward the most-reviewed. Not a national random sample, and not every business in each trade.
- **Bad reviews were oversampled on purpose.** Only 3.8% of recent reviews were 1 or 2 stars, so we pulled extra 1- and 2-star reviews to have enough to study. Every topic share is "of bad reviews" or "of 5-star reviews," never "of all reviews."
- **Tags slightly undercount,** most for quality and communication (section 17). Damage detection is weak.
- **"Price" means the review talks about money.** It includes fees, quotes, refunds and billing, not only "too expensive."
- **Owner-reply figures are directional.** Google's "most relevant" order tends to show reviews with replies, and we checked at most 50 reviews per business. Reply dates are as Google reports them,

and some reviews are edited later.

- **Staff names are an estimate,** counted from a list of 15,000 first names, with unclear words removed.
- **Painters (33 businesses) and house cleaners (39) are thinner** than the other four trades. Painters had no businesses from below spot 20, and house cleaning had one.
- **A snapshot.** These are reviews as they stood in November 2026.

To quote a figure, please credit "GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026" and link to this page. Every free guide and tool we make is at growthatlocal.com/free.

Example. A made-up local reporter writing about home repair quotes: "Money came up in 62.6% of 1- and 2-star reviews of local trades, against 15.4% of 5-star ones, according to a GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews in 10 Southeast cities, November 2026."

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] If you quote this report, use the credit line above and link to this page.
- [ ] If you're an owner, run your own audit. Your reviews beat our averages.



Your first 24 hours, in one list

If you only do five things today, do these:

- [ ] Run the review audit on your own profile (section 15).
- [ ] Write down every fee or extra a customer could be surprised by, and where you'll say it (section 1).
- [ ] Write your cancellation, refund and warranty rules in one paragraph each (section 2).
- [ ] Turn on review alerts and reply to every unanswered bad review, oldest first (sections 11 and 12).
- [ ] Remove any line in your review request that asks for a name or specific words (section 5).

Tomorrow, open your trade's guide and start its fix for your top complaint.



Where to go next

Each trade has its own guide, with that trade's tables, word lists, scripts and templates:

- What Customers Love and Hate About Roofers
- What Customers Love and Hate About Landscapers
- What Customers Love and Hate About Plumbers
- What Customers Love and Hate About HVAC Companies
- What Customers Love and Hate About House Cleaners
- What Customers Love and Hate About Painters

When a bad review lands, How to Answer a Bad Review has replies for the six most common cases. To get more 5-star reviews, 50 Review Request Texts That Get Replies gives you the words.



If you'd rather hand it off

Grow That Local does this work for local businesses. Each service starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay.

Best fit for this guide: Monthly report card. Free sample: your first report card, this month. The monthly report card is free.

Monthly report card — **free**
See how you stack up against local competitors. Free sample: your first report card, this month.

Websites — **from $1 a month · 7-day full refund**
A fast, good-looking site that turns visitors into calls. Free sample: a preview of your new site.

Google Business Profile — **$200 a month · 7-day full refund**
Show up in the map when neighbors search for what you do. Free sample: a profile check-up with 10+ fixes.

Review requests — **$100 a month · 7-day full refund**
More 5-star reviews, without the awkward asking. Free sample: your first 10 requests sent.

Social media posts — **$200 a month · 7-day full refund**
Fresh posts every week, made from your real job photos. Free sample: two weeks of posts, ready to go.

Email newsletter — **$50 a month · 7-day full refund**
Stay top of mind, so past customers call you first. Free sample: your first newsletter, written.

SEO — **$400 a month · 7-day full refund**
Climb Google for the searches that bring in jobs. Free sample: a ranking check and 10 fixes.

Win-back texts — **$100 a month · 7-day full refund**
Bring past customers back for their next job. Free sample: your first 25 customers texted.

Neighborhood postcard — **$400 a month · 7-day full refund**
Your ad in mailboxes across nice neighborhoods. Free sample: your ad, designed and shown on the card.

Text us at (423) 924-2014, or start at growthatlocal.com/start.

Sources

Every statistic above, with where to check it:

1. GTL analysis of 55,042 Google reviews, 10 Southeast cities, November 2026. 265 local trade businesses (50 roofers, 48 landscapers, 47 plumbers, 48 HVAC, 39 house cleaners, 33 painters) in Nashville, Tulsa, Louisville, Huntsville, Lexington, Birmingham, Memphis, Little Rock, Montgomery and Jackson MS, picked from three map bands per city. 45,059 reviews with text (6,502 1- or 2-star, 35,736 5-star). Topic tags checked by hand on 1,200 reviews (on 1,100 held out: 96.2% of tags right, 90.6% of topics caught, 76.8% exact). Owner replies from the first 50 reviews per business in Google's "most relevant" order (13,197 reviews, 1,037 of them 1- or 2-star). Totals only; no business, reviewer or staff member named. (before you start, sections 1 to 18)
2. BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026 (1,002 US adults, published Feb 11, 2026): 89% expect owners to respond to reviews; 42% are unlikely to use a business that never replies. brightlocal.com (section 11)
3. Same survey: 81% expect a reply within a week; 19% expect one the same day. (section 12) (brightlocal.com)
4. Same survey: 50% are put off by generic or templated replies. (section 10) (brightlocal.com)

Rules and guidance cited (not statistics), checked on 2026-11-12:

- Google Maps user-contributed content policy (bans asking for reviews with specific content, including naming a staff member; bans staff review quotas, incentives and asking only happy customers): support.google.com (section 5)
- Google Business Profile Help, "Manage customer reviews" (the reviewer is notified when you reply and can still edit their review): support.google.com (section 12)
- Google Business Profile Help, "Tips to improve your local ranking on Google" (relevance, distance and prominence; more reviews and positive ratings can help): support.google.com (section 9)

GTL estimates

These are our own judgment, not measured facts:

1. Replying to bad reviews within one business day is the cheapest review fix there is (section 12). Reasoning: it takes about 15 minutes, almost four in five replies in our sample took longer than a week, and four in five customers expect an answer inside one.

want it done for you?

Every part of this guide is something we do.

Each one starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay. Text us at (423) 924-2014 or start at growthatlocal.com/start.

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