

Respond to Every Review

Prospects read your response, not the review, as the signal of what you're like to deal with.

TIME	COST	DIFFICULTY	AUDIT SIGNAL
5 minutes per review	Free	Easy — with one serious exception	review_response_rate

WHAT WE MEASURED

We checked what share of your reviews have an owner response, and how quickly you typically reply.

WHY IT MATTERS

Google lists responding to reviews among its recommended actions for improving local ranking. Its own guidance: *"Reply to reviews: Show customers that their feedback matters."*

Consumer research points the same way — **89% of consumers expect owners to respond**, and **80% say they're more likely to use a business that responds to every review**. (That's a commercial survey of about a thousand people, so treat it as directional rather than precise.)

The mechanism is simple. A prospect reading a one-star review is really evaluating **your reply**. A defensive owner response converts one bad review into a reason not to call. A calm, specific one often converts it into confidence.

FIX IT YOURSELF

1 Respond to positive reviews too

Google specifically discourages copy-pasted blanket thank-yous: *"Instead of sending the same 'thank you' to everyone, focus on reviews where you can share a helpful update or answer a question."*

Two sentences, referencing something specific from their review, is enough. Also: **be conversational, not promotional**. Google explicitly says not to use responses to push deals — these people are already your customers.

2 Use this structure for a negative review

Under 75 words. Four moves:

1. **Thank and name the issue** — *"Thanks for telling us about the wait on Saturday."*
2. **Acknowledge without arguing** — *"That's not the experience we want."*
3. **State one concrete thing** — *"We've added a second tech to weekend shifts."*
4. **Move it offline with a real channel** — *"I'd like to make it right — please reach me at [number]. — Dave, Owner."*

Then **stop**. One public response, then private. Do not reply to their reply.

3 Respond within 24–48 hours — but draft first

Write it, then wait an hour before posting. Anger is extremely legible in writing, and a defensive reply lives on your profile permanently.

4 Never reveal anything the reviewer didn't

This is the big one, and it goes far beyond healthcare.

Confirming that someone is your customer, what they bought, what they paid, what happened at their appointment, or their payment history — when they posted anonymously — is a privacy problem in its own right, and in regulated fields it's an enforcement problem.

Never write "you never paid your balance" or "when you came in on the 14th." Ever.

5 MEDICAL, DENTAL, THERAPY: read this before you reply to anything

Responding to a patient review at all can be an unlawful disclosure of protected health information — because merely confirming someone is your patient is PHI. **The patient posting publicly does not waive HIPAA.** There is no "they started it" exception.

The Office for Civil Rights has enforced this repeatedly:

- A Dallas dental practice — **\$10,000 settlement** for a Yelp response disclosing a patient's name, treatment and insurance details.
- A Los Angeles dental practice — **\$23,000 settlement** plus a corrective action plan, for Yelp responses disclosing patient names and treatment.
- A New Jersey psychiatric practice — **\$30,000 settlement** for disclosing diagnoses and treatment in responses to negative reviews.

The only safe reply for a covered entity neither confirms nor denies the relationship:

"We take all feedback seriously and are committed to providing quality care. Our practice is bound by federal privacy law and cannot discuss any individual's care publicly. If you'd like to speak with our office manager, please call [number]."

That's it. Have exactly **one approved template**, **one named person** authorized to post it, and a written rule that nobody else touches review responses. Train your front desk explicitly — most of these enforcement actions started with a well-meaning employee defending the practice.

CHECK YOUR WORK

- ☐ You respond to every review, positive and negative.
- ☐ Responses go up within 48 hours.
- ☐ Positive responses are specific, not copy-pasted.
- ☐ Negative responses follow the four-part structure and move offline.
- ☐ You never reveal anything the reviewer didn't.
- ☐ Healthcare: you use one approved generic template, posted by one authorized person.

COMMON MISTAKES

- **Arguing the facts publicly.** You will lose even when you're right.
- **Threatening legal action in a reply.** This is itself an FTC violation under the review-suppression rule, and it's the fastest way to make the review famous.
- **Offering a refund to remove a review.** Prohibited by Google and Yelp, and it edges into FTC suppression territory.
- **Having staff post rebuttal reviews.** Conflict-of-interest violation and a federal rule violation.

This fix is free. You can earn and keep any Agenarys Seal tier — including Platinum — without paying Agenarys anything beyond the audit itself. If you would rather have help doing it, we sell that. We never sell passage.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

Google — Reply to reviews: support.google.com/business/answer/3474122

HHS Office for Civil Rights enforcement actions (Elite Dental 2019; New Vision Dental 2022; Manasa Health Center 2022)

16 CFR Part 465 § 465.7 (review suppression)

BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026 — commercial survey, directional