Why Replying to Google Reviews is One of the Highest-ROI Things You Can Do

I have three kids under five – and getting them out of the house regularly is *essential*. I'm always scouring Google Reviews for new and interesting kid-friendly things to do in our neighbourhood. I look for great reviews, of course, but you know what stands out even more? Reviews with responses from the business.

There's a "kids' cafe" not far from us that responds to every review. That tells us they care about their customers – and we go there often. I know I'm not alone in this, either.

BrightLocal's research found that 88 percent of consumers would use a business that responds to all of its reviews, both positive and negative.

Here's the data on why you should be replying to Google reviews, how to streamline the process with Buffer, plus a real-life example from boutique social media marketing agency Sapphire Social, which makes replying to reviews a priority for their clients.

Jump to a section:

5 reasons why replying to Google reviews matters

Replying to reviews is inarguably good practice – and common sense – but it can have a powerful effect on the bottom line, too. The numbers are fascinating:

1. Your customers are reading reviews

According to BrightLocal’s 2026 Local Consumer Review Survey, 97 percent of consumers read online reviews, with 41 percent saying they “always” read reviews when evaluating a business. That’s a big jump from 29 percent the year before.

Most of those reviews are on Google — roughly 81% of consumers use Google reviews specifically to evaluate local businesses (Sixth City Marketing).

And they’re not just skimming star ratings, they’re reading what businesses say back, just like I do, as I mentioned up top.

2. Replying to reviews directly impacts whether people choose you

Around 88% are influenced by whether a business responds to its reviews, good and bad. Engaging with your reviews makes consumers nearly twice as likely to choose you. And you don’t have to be perfect at it, you just have to do it.

And it’s not just about responding to the negative ones. Only 47% of consumers said they’d use a business that exclusively responds to negative reviews. Responding to only positive reviews fared similarly poorly. Interesting, right? Consumers apparently don’t love it when you cherry-pick which reviews to acknowledge.

The latest 2026 survey goes even further: 89% of consumers now *expect* business owners to respond to reviews, and 50 percent say generic, templated responses would make them less likely to choose a business (BrightLocal, 2026).

3. Responding to reviews correlates with more revenue

All of the above might sound like common sense, but there is revenue data behind it, too.

A study by Womply analyzed transaction data from more than 200,000 U.S. small businesses and found that businesses replying to at least 25 percent of their reviews earned 35 percent more revenue than average. Businesses that didn’t

respond to any reviews earned 9 percent less (Womply via Illuminate8).

Consumers also spend more when they see a business engaging with feedback. The same study found that people spend up to 49 percent more at businesses that reply to reviews.

And the Harvard Business Review found that when hotels began responding to reviews on TripAdvisor, they received 12 percent more reviews and their ratings increased by an average of 0.12 stars, without ever asking for more reviews (Harvard Business Review). A separate Harvard study found that a one-star improvement in rating can translate to a 5-9 percent increase in revenue.

4. It boosts your local search rankings

Google itself recommends responding to reviews. Their official Google Business Profile help documentation states that responding shows customers you value their feedback and signals responsiveness (Google Business Profile Help).

Review signals, which include volume, quality, recency, and whether a business responds, account for a meaningful portion of local search ranking factors. Research from SOCi found that businesses ranking in Google’s top three local results (the “3-Pack”) earn 126 percent more traffic and 93 percent more conversion-oriented actions than businesses ranked lower (SOCi).

Responding to reviews also feeds into Google’s E-E-A-T framework (Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness), which helps determine how prominently your business appears in local results. Each response is fresh, keyword-rich content on your profile, which is a signal Google rewards.

5. Negative reviews are actually an opportunity

This is the part that surprises most business owners: negative reviews, handled well, can actually help you.

Research from Reputation.com found that consumers are 33 percent more likely to upgrade their review if a business responds with a personalized message within a day. And businesses experience a 16 percent boost in customer advocacy when they address complaints publicly, versus a 37 percent decline when complaints go unanswered (Reputation).

Reputation CEO Joe Burton described the dynamic well in an interview with CX Dive: a negative review where the company visibly makes things right becomes something like a "superpowered review." It demonstrates accountability in a way that even five-star reviews can't (CX Dive).

There's also the practical consideration that 85% of consumers say seeing whether a company responds to negative reviews is important in their purchasing decision. Silence in the face of criticism tells potential customers you either don't care or aren't paying attention.

The data makes a pretty compelling case. But keeping on top of Google reviews is easier said than done — especially when you're managing more than one."

How one agency made Google reviews manageable

Everything above applies to a single business with one Google Business Profile. Now multiply it. This is something I hear constantly from agencies and multi-location businesses.

Each location receives its own reviews, has its own customer

base, and may require a tailored response due to local context. A copy-paste reply that works for one client might sound completely wrong for another.

BrightLocal's guide on multi-location review management highlights the core tension: maintaining brand consistency while keeping responses local and authentic (BrightLocal). And the stakes are high. BrightLocal found that 91 percent of consumers say local branch reviews impact their overall perception of a multi-location brand.

When Alexandrea Browman, founder of Sapphire Social, described her workflow before Buffer, she talked about logging into individual client accounts, switching between platforms, and trying to make sure nothing fell through the cracks.

Sapphire Social manages around 30 channels across multiple clients, and when I asked her what Buffer feature has made the biggest difference to her workflow, she didn't hesitate: community management.

Specifically, **the ability to respond to Google reviews without logging into each client's account separately.**

"I can't tell you how amazing community management through Buffer has been," she told me. "We don't have to select from inbox or comments, it's just all in one place. It's so simple."

Before, her team had two options: log in with the client's credentials (a security headache) or navigate through native platforms (a patience-testing headache). Now they handle everything in one dashboard. For an agency juggling multiple Google Business Profiles, that's the difference between staying on top of reviews and letting them quietly pile up unanswered.

Introducing Google review replies in Buffer

This is exactly why we've added support for replying to Google reviews directly in Buffer. If you're already managing your Google Business Profiles in Buffer, you can now see incoming reviews and respond to them from the same place you manage the rest of your social presence.

For agencies like Sapphire Social, this means no more logging into individual client accounts to check for new reviews. For franchises and chains, it means finally having a centralized view of reviews across every location. And for any business with a Google Business Profile, it means one less reason to let reviews go unanswered.

As Alexandrea told me: “If you want a tool that handles scheduling, quality control, community management, and team management without the usual headaches, Buffer is it.”

How to build a review response habit that actually works

You don’t need to turn review management into a full-time job. A few principles go a long way.

Respond to everything. The data is clear. Consumers prefer businesses that respond to all reviews, not just negative ones, not just positive ones. Selective responding looks calculated.

Be timely. BrightLocal found that 19 percent of consumers expect a same-day response, and 81 percent expect a response within a week. The faster you respond, the more it signals that you’re actively engaged.

Personalize your replies. Half of consumers say generic, templated responses put them off. Mention specifics from the review. Use the reviewer’s name. Keep it conversational, not corporate.

Don’t get defensive with negative reviews. Acknowledge the experience, apologize where appropriate, and offer to take the conversation offline. This isn’t just for the reviewer. It’s for every future customer reading the thread.

Use tools that centralize the work. This is especially critical for multi-location businesses and agencies. Having one place where reviews across all your Google Business Profiles surface, where you can read, respond, and track, turns an overwhelming task into a manageable daily habit. As Alexandrea put it when describing what changed for her team: “We also don’t have to select from inbox or comments, it’s just all in one place.”

Don’t leave reviews on read

Google reviews are one of the most visible pieces of content associated with your business. Every one of them is a conversation waiting to happen and if you have those conversations, you’re earning more trust, more clicks, and more revenue.

(And helping parents like me find a good way to entertain the kiddos!)

More resources for businesses

https://buffer.com/resources/replying-to-google-reviews/