



REVIEW ENFORCEMENT · 2025–2026

Google Reviews & GBP Policy

Fact-checking the 2025–2026 review-enforcement claims, with sourced verdicts

The original summary is directionally right — Google tightened review enforcement and the FTC made manipulation expensive. But several specifics need correcting before they drive compliance decisions.

Informational research, not legal advice. Have counsel review final policy and customer-communication language before rollout.

PREPARED

JUNE 9, 2026

SUBJECT

Google reviews, Business Profile / Maps policy changes, AI review enforcement, and FTC Consumer Review Rule exposure.

292M+

POLICY-VIOLATING
REVIEWS GOOGLE
REMOVED IN 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The corrections that matter.

The original summary is directionally correct. These seven points are where the wording needs tightening before it drives compliance decisions.

- 01** **“Staff mention ban” is misleading.** Google bans *merchants directing staff* to solicit reviews with specific content (including staff-identifying content) — not a customer voluntarily writing “Sarah was helpful.”

- 02** **The April 17, 2026 policy change is real.** Staff-review-quota and staff-identity solicitation clauses were added to Google’s Rating Manipulation policy; the official Help page is the controlling source.

- 03** **Google’s 2025 enforcement numbers are real:** 292M+ reviews removed, 79M edits blocked, 782K+ accounts restricted, 13M+ fake profiles removed.

- 04** **“Gemini removed 292M reviews” is too strong.** Google ties Gemini specifically to catching fake/unhelpful *edits* faster; review enforcement is described as evolving AI systems + expert analysts.

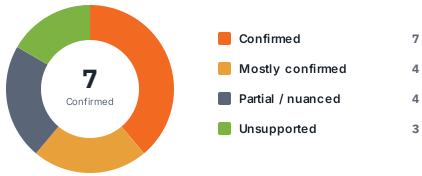
- 05** **The “600% increase” is third-party data,** not an official Google statistic — useful context, but attribute it as monitoring data.

- 06** **“30+ days dormant = visibility loss” is unsupported** as a hard rule. Google rewards accurate, current, well-reviewed profiles — but publishes no 30-day dormancy penalty.

- 07** **The \$53,088-per-violation FTC fine is real;** the knowledge standard is broader than “actual knowledge” — it includes *knowledge fairly implied from objective circumstances*.

VERDICT SNAPSHOT

Claim-by-claim verdicts.



Seven claims are directly confirmed against official Google or federal sources. The rest need nuance, are third-party-sourced, or are unsupported as stated. Full evidence per row below; detail follows in the findings.

■ Confirmed
 ■ Mostly confirmed
 ■ Partial / high-risk
 ■ Unsupported / misleading

17 claims assessed

ORIGINAL CLAIM	VERDICT	WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS
Google replaced GBP Q&A with an AI-powered "Ask" button.	MOSTLY CONFIRMED	My Business Q&A API discontinued Nov 3, 2025; Ask Maps confirmed in Google's March 2026 post.
Google rolled out its December 2025 Core Update.	CONFIRMED	Search Status Dashboard: ran Dec 11-29, 2025.
The Dec 2025 Core Update explains GBP review removals.	UNSUPPORTED	Core updates are a Search system; no primary tie to Maps/GBP review removal.
FTC sent its first Consumer Review Rule warning letters Dec 22, 2025.	CONFIRMED	FTC announced letters to 10 companies that date.
Google review deletions up 600%, still 400% above normal.	PARTIAL	Third-party (GMBapi) monitoring, not a Google statistic.
Google updated Maps UGC policy under "Rating Manipulation" Apr 17, 2026.	MOSTLY CONFIRMED	New staff-quota / staff-identity clauses; industry-dated Apr 17, 2026.
Staff mention ban — customers can't mention employees by name.	MISLEADING	Targets merchant solicitation of specific content, not voluntary mentions.

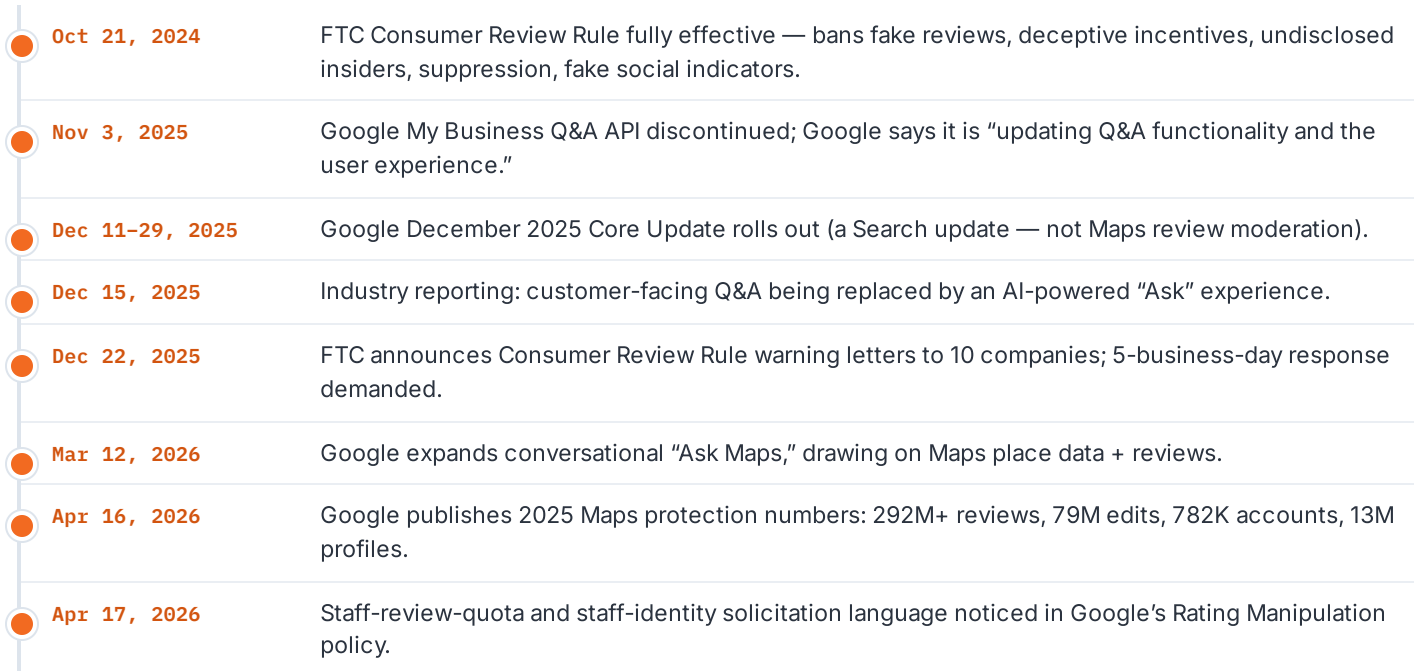
VERDICT SNAPSHOT – CONTINUED

ORIGINAL CLAIM	VERDICT	WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS
Review quotas are banned.	CONFIRMED	Google lists staff being asked to solicit a set number of reviews as prohibited.
On-site kiosks / shared tablets are banned.	HIGH-RISK	“Kiosk” not in policy verbatim, but on-premises pressure is prohibited.
Incentivized reviews are banned.	CONFIRMED	Google + FTC both prohibit incentives tied to reviews/sentiment.
292M reviews, 79M edits, 782K accounts, 13M profiles in 2025.	CONFIRMED	In Google’s Apr 16, 2026 Maps safety post.
Those 292M actions were specifically “using Gemini AI.”	MISLEADING	Gemini cited for edits; reviews = AI models + analysts generally.
Real photos only; no stock or AI-generated images.	PARTIAL	Real media favored, but blanket “no AI” is too broad (Product Studio).
Profiles dormant 30+ days lose visibility; weekly updates required.	UNSUPPORTED	No weekly-posting or 30-day dormancy rule in ranking guidance.
Penalties: removals, warning banner, posting restrictions, suspension.	MOSTLY CONFIRMED	Google documents all of these for policy patterns.
FTC penalties up to \$53,088 per violation.	CONFIRMED	16 CFR § 1.98 current adjustment.
FTC civil penalties generally require actual knowledge.	INCOMPLETE	Actual knowledge OR knowledge fairly implied from objective circumstances.

HOW WE GOT HERE

Timeline of relevant events.

From the FTC rule taking effect to the April 2026 policy clauses — the dated record behind the claims.



Oct 21, 2024	FTC Consumer Review Rule fully effective — bans fake reviews, deceptive incentives, undisclosed insiders, suppression, fake social indicators.
Nov 3, 2025	Google My Business Q&A API discontinued; Google says it is “updating Q&A functionality and the user experience.”
Dec 11–29, 2025	Google December 2025 Core Update rolls out (a Search update — not Maps review moderation).
Dec 15, 2025	Industry reporting: customer-facing Q&A being replaced by an AI-powered “Ask” experience.
Dec 22, 2025	FTC announces Consumer Review Rule warning letters to 10 companies; 5-business-day response demanded.
Mar 12, 2026	Google expands conversational “Ask Maps,” drawing on Maps place data + reviews.
Apr 16, 2026	Google publishes 2025 Maps protection numbers: 292M+ reviews, 79M edits, 782K accounts, 13M profiles.
Apr 17, 2026	Staff-review-quota and staff-identity solicitation language noticed in Google’s Rating Manipulation policy.

FINDING 01 MOSTLY CONFIRMED

GBP Q&A and the AI “Ask” experience

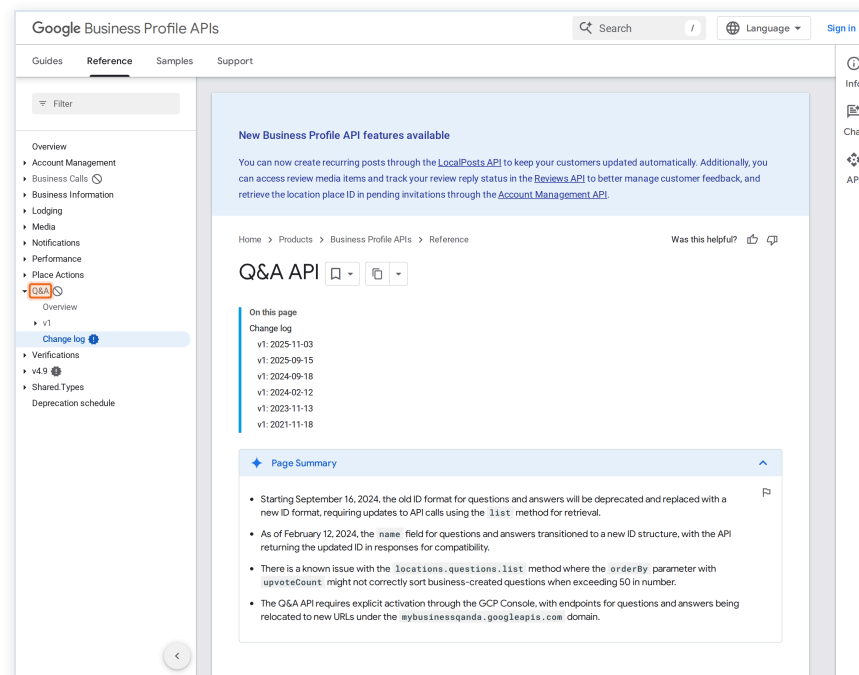
Google materially changed the GBP/Maps Q&A experience. The official evidence is the My Business Q&A API discontinuation (Nov 3, 2025); industry reporting says the public-facing Q&A is being replaced by an AI-powered Ask.

WHAT NEEDS NUANCE

The claim that Ask pulls from “reviews, business info, and website FAQs” is only partly sourced. There is clear support for place/business data and reviews; this research set found no primary Google source explicitly confirming “website FAQs” as a formal input to the GBP Ask answer set.

BUSINESS IMPACT

Assume accurate, consistent information across GBP fields, website content, services, products, attributes, photos, and reviews can influence AI-generated local answers. That does not make keyword-stuffing reviews or scripting customer content safe — Google’s review policy says the opposite.



Google's developer changelog: the My Business Q&A API was discontinued on November 3, 2025. developers.google.com

GBP Q&A AND THE AI "ASK" EXPERIENCE – CONTINUED

Sources: Google My Business Q&A API changelog · Google Ask Maps blog · Search Engine Roundtable: Q&A replaced by Ask

FINDING 02

UNSUPPORTED LINK

December 2025 Core Update vs. review removals

The December 2025 core update is real, but there is no strong evidence it directly caused Business Profile review removals. Core updates change Search ranking systems; Maps/GBP review moderation is a separate enforcement mechanism operated by the same company.

PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

If a business lost organic Search traffic around December 2025, the core update may be relevant. If it lost reviews, analyze the actual review levers instead:

- Maps/GBP prohibited-content policies
- Fake engagement / rating-manipulation patterns
- Review solicitation practices and velocity spikes
- Device / IP / location patterns
- Incentives, gating, contests, quotas, or template language
- Google's AI + human review enforcement systems

The screenshot shows the Google Search Status Dashboard for the 'December 2025 core update' incident. The dashboard includes a navigation bar with the Google logo and a breadcrumb trail: 'Google Search Status Dashboard > Incidents > December 2025 core update'. Below the navigation, there is a section titled 'Google Search Status Dashboard' with a brief description and a link to support. A legend indicates the status of services: Available (green checkmark), Service information (blue circle), Service disruption (orange circle), and Service outage (red circle). The incident is titled 'December 2025 core update' and notes that it began at 2025-12-11 09:25 and ended at 2025-12-29 11:00 (all times are US/Pacific). A table lists the incident details:

DATE	TIME	DESCRIPTION
29 Dec 2025	11:05 PST	The rollout was complete as of December 29, 2025.
11 Dec 2025	09:25 PST	Released the December 2025 core update. The rollout may take up to 3 weeks to complete.

At the bottom of the dashboard, there are links for 'Documentation', 'RSS Feed', 'JSON History', 'Schema', 'JSON Product Catalog', 'Schema', 'Send feedback', and 'Privacy policy'.

Search Status Dashboard: the December 2025 core update ran Dec 11–29, 2025 — a Search update, not Maps review moderation. status.search.google.com

DECEMBER 2025 CORE UPDATE VS. REVIEW REMOVALS – CONTINUED

Sources: [Google Search Status Dashboard – Dec 2025 core update](#) · [Google Search Central – core updates guidance](#)

FINDING 03

CONFIRMED

Current review policy: Rating Manipulation

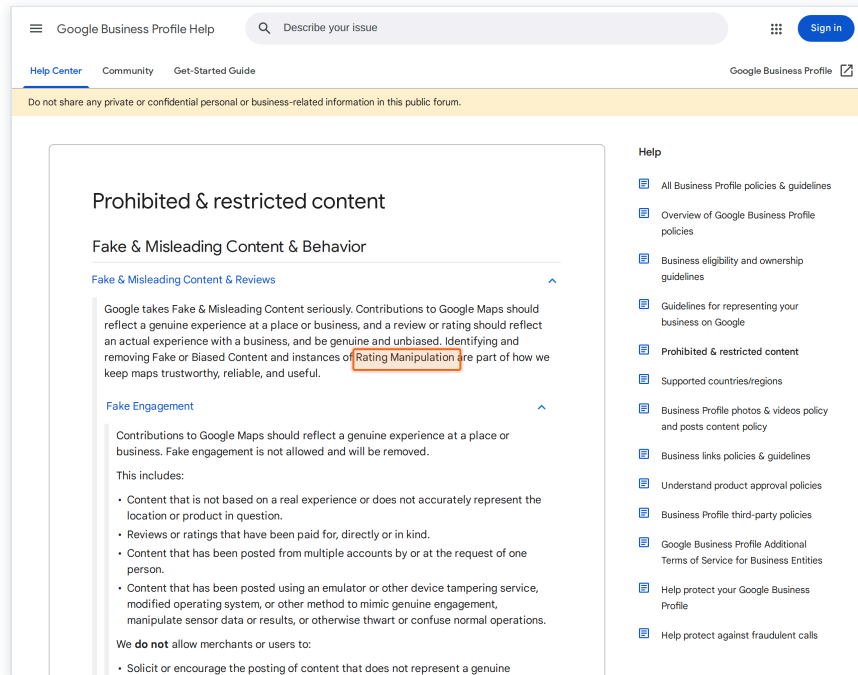
Google's Prohibited & Restricted Content policy, under Rating Manipulation, is the controlling source for the Google-side review claims. Based on the current policy, businesses should not:

- Offer payment, discounts, free goods/services, or other incentives for posting a review or changing/removing a negative one.
- Discourage or prohibit negative reviews.
- Selectively solicit positive reviews from customers.
- Require or pressure users to review while physically on the premises.
- Ask for specific content to be included in a review.
- Request that staff solicit a certain number of reviews.
- Request that staff solicit reviews containing specific content, including content that identifies staff members.

WHAT IS STILL ALLOWED

Merchants may solicit genuine reviews from customers who had a real experience — as long as they offer no incentive and do not influence the review's rating, content, or sentiment. A safe review request is neutral, non-selective, and open-ended.

CURRENT REVIEW POLICY: RATING MANIPULATION – CONTINUED



Google Business Profile policy — the Rating Manipulation section is the controlling source. support.google.com

Sources: Google BP Help – Prohibited & restricted content · Google BP Help – Tips to get more reviews

FINDING 04 MISLEADING AS WORDED

The staff-name issue

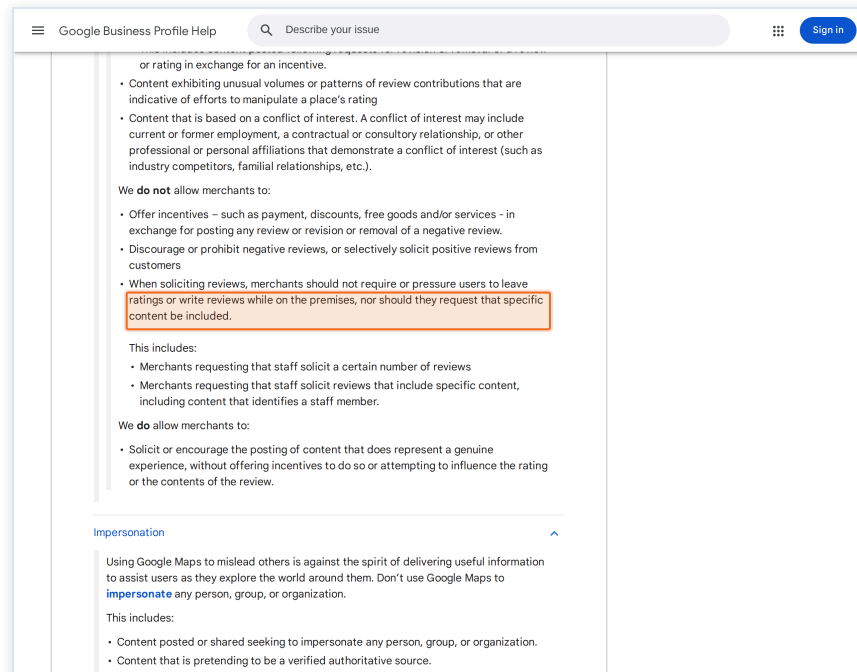
“Staff mention ban” is risky shorthand. The policy targets a merchant asking or directing staff to solicit reviews with specific content, including content that identifies staff members — not a customer’s voluntary mention.

BETTER WORDING

Google prohibits merchants from asking or directing staff to solicit reviews with specific content, including content that identifies staff members.

WHY IT MATTERS

A customer naturally writing “Sarah at the front desk was very helpful” is not the same as a business telling staff “ask every customer to mention your name.” The second creates a manipulated pattern, and Google now explicitly calls out staff-identity solicitation.



The policy targets merchant solicitation of specific content identifying a staff member — not voluntary customer mentions. support.google.com

THE STAFF-NAME ISSUE – CONTINUED

Sources: Google BP Help – Prohibited & restricted content · Search Engine Roundtable – Apr 17 coverage · PPC Land – Apr 17 coverage

FINDING 05

CONFIRMED

Review quotas, contests, and staff KPIs

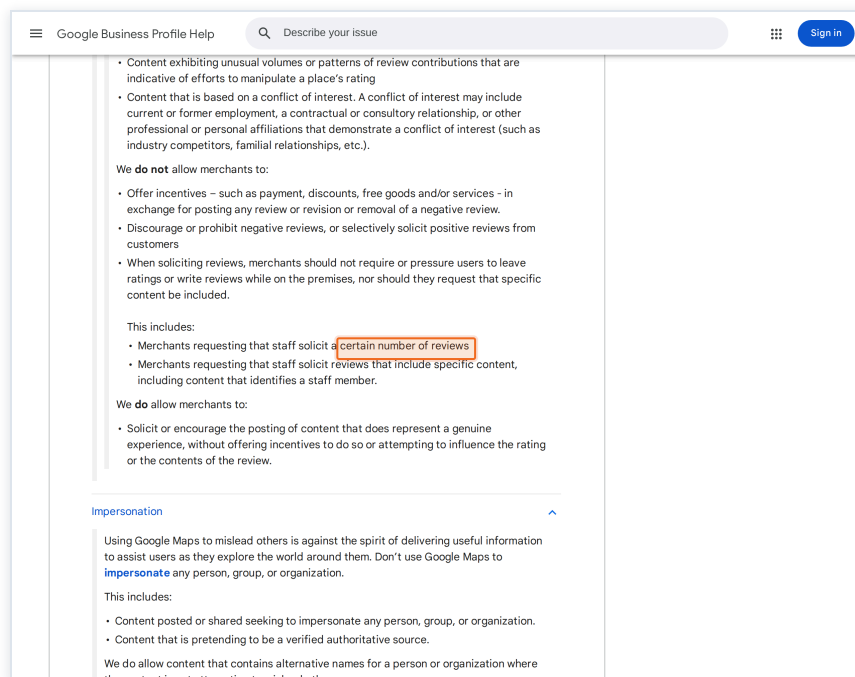
Google now explicitly identifies review quotas as prohibited rating manipulation when merchants request that staff solicit a certain number of reviews.

HIGH-RISK INTERNAL PRACTICES — STOP OR REVISE

- “Each employee must get 10 reviews per month.”
- “The staff member with the most reviews wins a bonus.”
- “Your review count affects your performance review.”
- “Ask customers to mention you so we can track review credit.”
- “The team/location with the most Google reviews wins.”

LOWER-RISK ALTERNATIVE

Track program compliance without tying pay or performance to public Google reviews — e.g. whether staff explained the feedback process neutrally, whether all customers got the same neutral post-visit request, and whether negative feedback was escalated without suppressing public-review options.



Google explicitly prohibits merchants requesting that staff solicit a certain number of reviews. support.google.com

REVIEW QUOTAS, CONTESTS, AND STAFF KPIS – CONTINUED

Sources: Google BP Help – Prohibited & restricted content

FINDING 06 **CONFIRMED**

Review gating

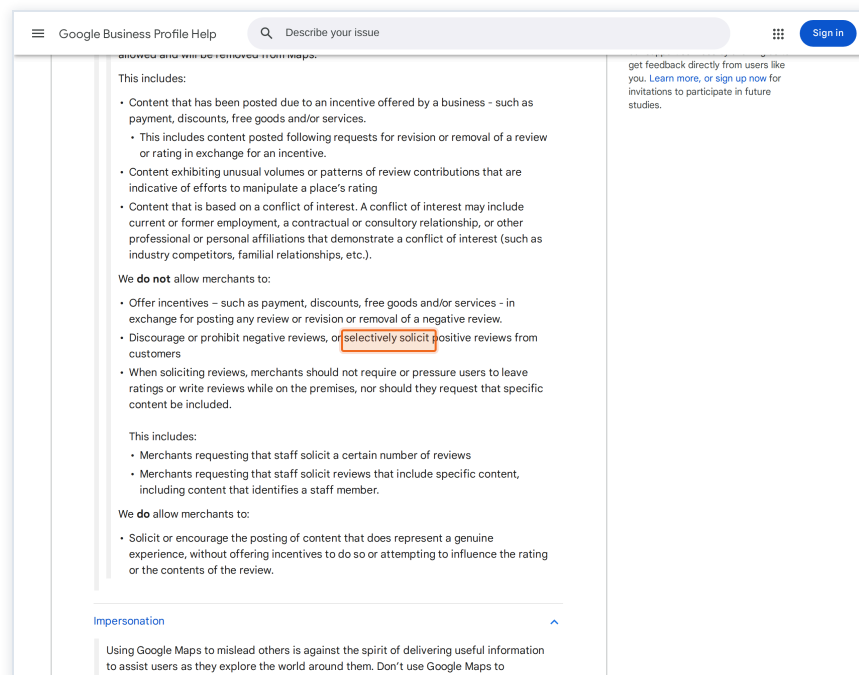
Review gating means filtering customers by sentiment before asking for a public review — ask “how was it?”, route happy customers to Google, send unhappy ones to private feedback only.

GOOGLE RISK

Google prohibits selectively soliciting positive reviews from customers — which directly captures gating.

FTC RISK

The Consumer Review Rule also addresses review suppression and deceptive review presentation. Risk arises if a business suppresses negative feedback or misrepresents that published reviews represent all or most submitted reviews while filtering by sentiment.



Selectively soliciting positive reviews is prohibited — this captures review gating. support.google.com

REVIEW GATING – CONTINUED

Sources: Google BP Help – Prohibited & restricted content · Consumer Review Rule – 16 CFR Part 465 · FTC – Consumer Reviews Rule overview

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FINDING 07 HIGH-RISK (NOT VERBATIM)

On-site kiosks and shared tablets

The words “kiosk” or “shared tablet” do not appear on the current policy page. But Google does prohibit requiring or pressuring users to review while on premises, which makes store-controlled review collection operationally risky.

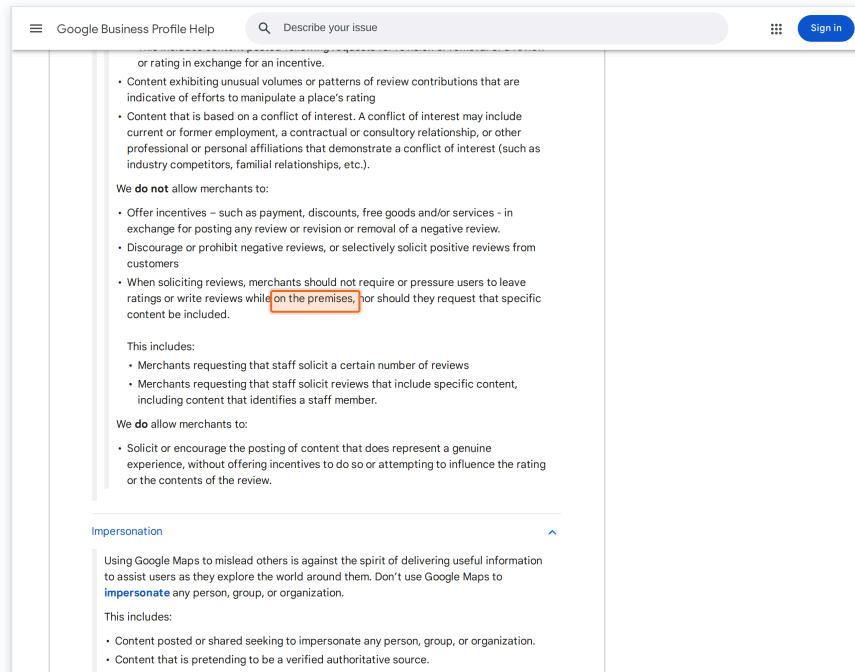
WHY KIOSKS/TABLETS ARE RISKY

- They can make the request feel pressured or supervised.
- They create unusual device, IP, location, and timing patterns.
- Staff may coach or influence review content.
- They can be combined with gating or incentives.
- They make it harder to show the review was voluntary and independent.

RECOMMENDED POLICY

Don't collect Google reviews through a store-owned kiosk, front-desk tablet, or staff-controlled device. Send the same neutral review link after the visit by email/SMS, or provide a QR code customers use later on their own device without staff pressure.

ON-SITE KIOSKS AND SHARED TABLETS – CONTINUED



The screenshot shows the Google Business Profile Help page. The header includes a search bar with the text "Describe your issue" and a "Sign In" button. The main content area lists prohibited content rules. A red box highlights the phrase "on the premises" in the following rule:

- When soliciting reviews, merchants should not require or pressure users to leave ratings or write reviews while **on the premises**, nor should they request that specific content be included.

This rule is part of a section titled "We do not allow merchants to:" which also includes rules about offering incentives and discouraging negative reviews. Below this, there is a section titled "Impersonation" which states that using Google Maps to mislead others is against the spirit of delivering useful information and that users should not impersonate any person, group, or organization.

Google prohibits requiring or pressuring users to review while on the premises — the basis for kiosk/tablet risk. support.google.com

Sources: Google BP Help – Prohibited & restricted content

FINDING 08

CONFIRMED

Incentivized reviews

Google clearly prohibits incentives tied to reviews — for leaving one, and for changing or removing a negative one. The FTC rule also prohibits buying or procuring reviews when the incentive is conditioned on a particular sentiment.

PROHIBITED / HIGH-RISK INCENTIVES

- “Leave a review and get 10% off.”
- “Show us your Google review for a free item.”
- “Leave a five-star review and enter a prize drawing.”
- “Change your review and we’ll refund you.” / “Remove your negative review for a discount.”
- “Employees get a bonus for each five-star review.”

SAFER ALTERNATIVE

A general customer-feedback program may run if it conditions no reward on public review behavior, star rating, sentiment, or removal. Even then, review it carefully — incentives can still affect authenticity and disclosure obligations.

INCENTIVIZED REVIEWS – CONTINUED

Google Business Profile Help [Sign In](#)

Contributions to Google Maps should reflect a genuine experience at a place or business. Fake engagement is not allowed and will be removed.

This includes:

- Content that is not based on a real experience or does not accurately represent the location or product in question.
- Reviews or ratings that have been paid for, directly or in kind.
- Content that has been posted from multiple accounts by or at the request of one person.
- Content that has been posted using an emulator or other device tampering service, modified operating system, or other method to mimic genuine engagement, manipulate sensor data or results, or otherwise thwart or confuse normal operations.

We **do not** allow merchants or users to:

- Solicit or encourage the posting of content that does not represent a genuine experience.
- Offer **incentives** such as payment, discounts, free goods and/or services - in exchange for posting any review or revision or removal of a negative review.
- Post content on a competitor's place or business to undermine that business' or product's reputation.

[Rating Manipulation](#)


Contributions to Google Maps should reflect a genuine experience at a place or business. Rating Manipulation includes Incentivized or Biased Reviews, which are not allowed and will be removed from Maps.

This includes:

- Content that has been posted due to an incentive offered by a business - such as payment, discounts, free goods and/or services.
 - This includes content posted following requests for revision or removal of a review or rating in exchange for an incentive.
- Content exhibiting unusual volumes or patterns of review contributions that are indicative of efforts to manipulate a place's rating
- Content that is based on a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest may include current or former employment, a contractual or consultative relationship, or other professional or personal affiliations that demonstrate a conflict of interest (such as

and posts content policy

- [Business links policies & guidelines](#)
- [Understand product approval policies](#)
- [Business Profile third-party policies](#)
- [Google Business Profile Additional Terms of Service for Business Entities](#)
- [Help protect your Google Business Profile](#)
- [Help protect against fraudulent calls](#)



Shape the future of Google support

User research studies help us improve our support services by allowing us to get feedback directly from users like you. [Learn more](#), or [sign up now](#) for invitations to participate in future studies.

Incentives for posting, changing, or removing a review are prohibited. support.google.com

Sources: Google BP Help – Prohibited & restricted content · Consumer Review Rule – 16 CFR Part 465 · FTC business blog on warning letters

FINDING 09 **CONFIRMED (GEMINI WORDING ASIDE)**

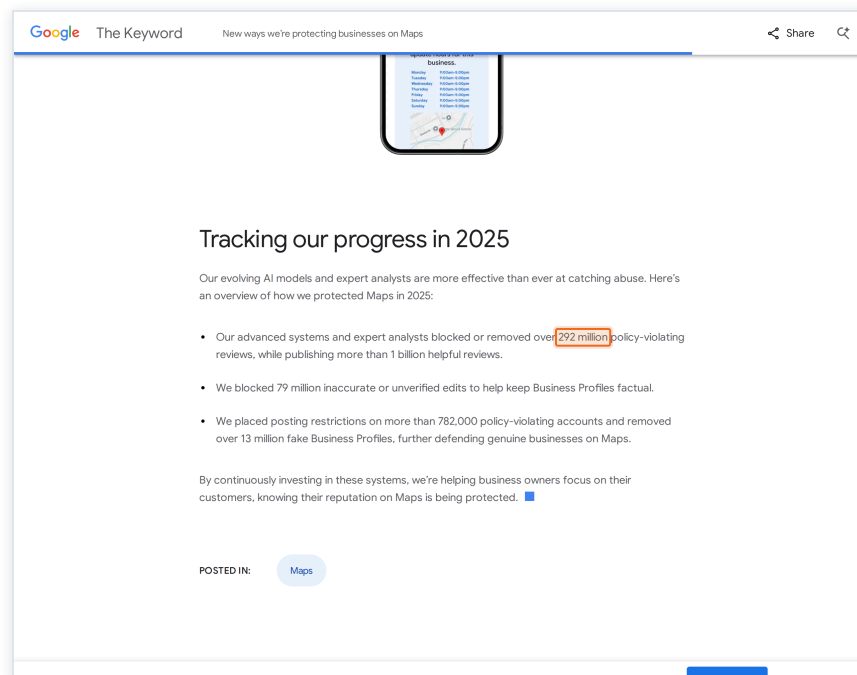
Google's 2025 enforcement numbers

Google's April 16, 2026 Maps safety post reports the 2025 enforcement figures. The numbers are real; the "using Gemini AI" framing is what needs correcting.

- 292M+ policy-violating reviews blocked or removed.
- 79M inaccurate or unverified edits blocked.
- 782K+ policy-violating accounts had posting restrictions placed.
- 13M+ fake Business Profiles removed.

GEMINI NUANCE

Google references AI models and expert analysts for review enforcement generally, and specifically says Gemini models help catch fake/unhelpful edits faster. The post does not say all 292M review actions were Gemini-driven. Safer phrasing: "AI-driven systems and expert analysts removed 292M+ policy-violating reviews in 2025, with Gemini specifically described as catching problematic edits faster."



Google's April 16, 2026 Maps post: 292M+ policy-violating reviews blocked or removed in 2025. blog.google

GOOGLE'S 2025 ENFORCEMENT NUMBERS – CONTINUED

Sources: Google Maps protections blog

FINDING 10 PARTIALLY SUPPORTED

Third-party review-deletion surge data

The “up 600%, still 400% above normal” framing comes from third-party monitoring, not Google. GMBapi reported that locations with at least one deleted review in a single week rose more than sixfold between January and July 2025.

WHAT IS SUPPORTED

At the July peak, GMBapi said nearly 1,200 managed locations — roughly 2% of its monitored sample — had at least one review deleted in a week.

WHAT NEEDS CAUTION

This is not an official Google metric and does not mean Google-wide deletions rose by exactly 600% — it means the monitored sample showed a sharp rise in affected locations. Attribute the 400% “still above normal” figure to third-party/industry reporting unless independently verified.

The screenshot shows a webpage from GMBapi.com with a blue header. The main content area has a white background with a blue border. The article title is "The Global Wave of Deleted Google Reviews: What Our Data Reveals About AI, Law, and Trust". The author is Michel Van Lujtelaar, and the article was last updated on December 18, 2025. A line chart titled "Weekly Deleted Reviews (Jan-Jul 2025)" is displayed, showing a sharp increase in deleted reviews starting in early 2025, peaking in July 2025 at approximately 1,200 reviews per week, and then declining. The chart's y-axis is labeled "Deleted Reviews" and ranges from 0 to 1,500. The x-axis is labeled "Week" and shows dates from 2025-01 to 2025-08.

GMBapi third-party monitoring — affected locations rose more than sixfold (Jan–Jul 2025). Not a Google statistic. gmbapi.com

THIRD-PARTY REVIEW-DELETION SURGE DATA – CONTINUED

Sources: GMBapi – review deletion analysis · ALM Corp – summary

FINDING 11

MOSTLY CONFIRMED

Google platform penalties

Google documents several consequences for fake engagement and policy violations. The original “silent removals” framing needs softening.

POSSIBLE GOOGLE-SIDE CONSEQUENCES

- Review removal.
- Restriction from receiving new reviews/ratings for a set period.
- Temporary unpublishing of existing reviews/ratings.
- Public warning banner that fake reviews were removed.
- Broader content, profile, or merchant-account restrictions.
- Business Profile suspension where broader/repeated violations affect the account.

NUANCE

“Silent removals” can happen from the owner’s point of view, but Google says users or owners may be notified in many cases — especially for profile restrictions. Safer: “Reviews may be removed or hidden with limited notice, and formal restrictions may trigger email notification and appeal options.”

The screenshot shows the Google Business Profile Help Center page for "Business Profile restrictions for policy violations". The page is titled "Business Profile restrictions for policy violations" and contains the following sections:

- Business Profile restrictions for policy violations**: Reviews and ratings can help consumers choose a business for their needs. That's why we take fake and/or incentivized reviews and ratings on businesses very seriously. Businesses that violate our Fake Engagement policy may be subject to certain restrictions if we determine violative activity on their profile(s). For more information about our Fake Engagement policy, see our [list of Prohibited and restricted content](#).
- Potential restrictions on Business Profiles**: If we determine that a business owner has violated our Fake Engagement policy, we might place restrictions on their Business Profile (in addition to removing the violative reviews). Examples of possible restrictions include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Business Profile will not be able to receive new reviews or ratings for set period of time
 - Business Profile's existing reviews or ratings will be unpublished for set period of time
 - Business Profile will display a warning to let consumers know that fake reviews were removed
 We will notify business owners via email if we plan to apply a restriction to their profile.
- Appeal your Business Profile restriction**: Businesses have the ability to appeal our decision. Once submitted, we will re-review the profile and any additional context the business provides in the appeal. We will share the status of our review once we determine whether the restrictions should be removed. If you believe we incorrectly evaluated your Business Profile, [please submit an appeal here](#).

On the right side of the page, there is a "Manage reviews" section with the following links:

- Manage customer reviews
- Tips to get more reviews
- Create a Google link or QR code to request reviews
- Report inappropriate reviews on your Business Profile
- Report negative review extortion scams on your Business Profile
- Move your reviews across Business Profiles
- About photo updates from customers
- About third-party reviews
- About reviews for service businesses
- About missing or delayed reviews
- Understand review scores for local places & businesses
- Getting started with local business reviews (EU-only)
- Business Profile restrictions for policy violations

Google documents review removal, warning banners, posting restrictions, and temporary unpublishing. support.google.com

GOOGLE PLATFORM PENALTIES – CONTINUED

Sources: Business Profile restrictions for policy violations · Google Maps consumer alerts · Removed and rejected content · Business Profile policy overview

FINDING 12 **CONFIRMED (\$53,088)**

FTC Consumer Review Rule exposure

The Consumer Review Rule is now central to review-compliance risk. It targets fake reviews; selling/disseminating reviews that misrepresent the reviewer or experience; sentiment-conditioned incentives; undisclosed insider reviews; company-controlled “independent” review sites; certain suppression; and fake social indicators.

FINE AMOUNT

The current civil-penalty adjustment lists \$53,088 per relevant FTC Act violation (16 CFR § 1.98).

KNOWLEDGE STANDARD CORRECTION

“Generally requires actual knowledge” is incomplete. FTC’s enforcement-authority page says trade-regulation-rule penalties can apply with actual knowledge OR knowledge fairly implied on the basis of objective circumstances.

WARNING LETTERS

The Dec 2025 template demanded a response within five business days. The FTC may warn first in some cases, but businesses should not rely on receiving a warning before enforcement.

FTC CONSUMER REVIEW RULE EXPOSURE – CONTINUED

16 CFR § 1.98 — the current adjustment lists \$53,088 for the relevant FTC Act penalties. ecf.r.gov

Sources: Consumer Review Rule – 16 CFR Part 465 · 16 CFR § 1.98 – civil penalty adjustments · FTC – Enforcement Authority · FTC Dec 2 2, 2025 press release

FINDING 13 **PARTIALLY SUPPORTED**

Photos, stock images, and AI-generated images

Google's Maps media guidance favors authentic, location-captured media — use media you captured, avoid stock and heavily edited images, avoid third-party imagery, and create media at the actual location. A blanket “no AI” claim, however, is too broad.

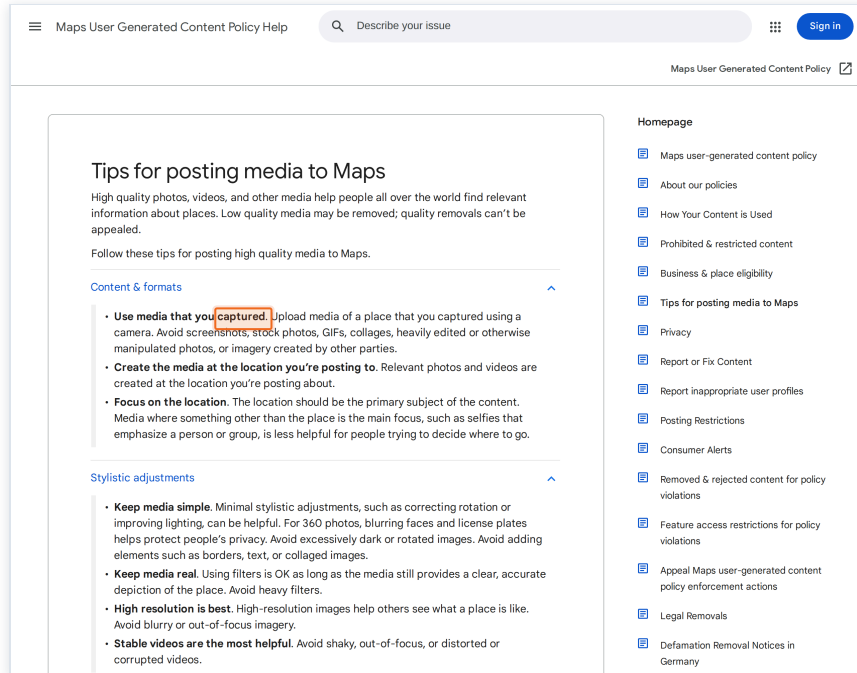
PRIORITIZE

- Real storefront and interior photos.
- Real team photos where appropriate.
- Real product/service photos.
- Truthful, compliant before/after photos.
- Current images that accurately reflect the location.

AI-IMAGE NUANCE

Google offers Product Studio for Business Profile — an AI tool for product-image editing/scene generation in some contexts. But don't use AI images that misrepresent a real location, staff, customer, product, or outcome. Synthetic storefronts, fake interiors, fake customers, and fabricated before/after imagery are high-risk.

PHOTOS, STOCK IMAGES, AND AI-GENERATED IMAGES – CONTINUED



Google's Maps media guidance favors real, location-captured media and discourages stock/edited imagery. support.google.com

Sources: Google Maps media tips · Product Studio for Business Profile

FINDING 14 UNSUPPORTED AS A HARD RULE

Profile freshness and the “30-day dormancy” claim

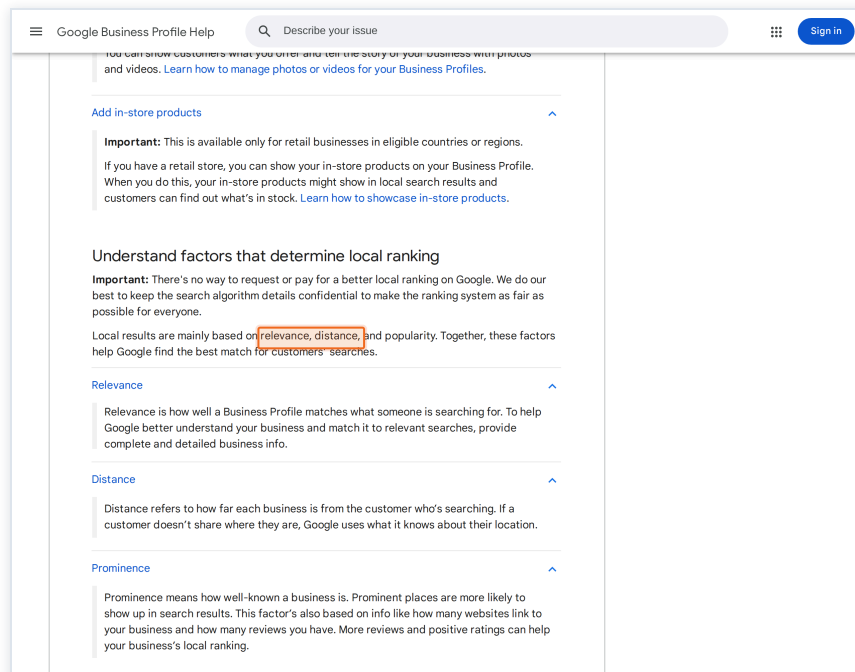
Google’s local-ranking guidance says to enter complete data, verify locations, keep hours accurate, manage and respond to reviews, add photos/videos, and keep information accurate. Local ranking is primarily relevance, distance, and prominence.

WHAT IS UNSUPPORTED

- A hard “30-day dormant profile” ranking penalty.
- A weekly-update requirement.
- A rule that every profile must post at least once every 30 days.

PRACTICAL CADENCE

Keep profiles active because it improves accuracy, conversion, trust, and UX — not because a verified 30-day penalty exists. Update hours immediately when they change, update services/products as offerings change, add real photos regularly, reply to reviews consistently, and post for real news/offers/events — don’t post filler just to hit a cadence.



Google’s local ranking is built on relevance, distance, and prominence — no 30-day dormancy penalty. support.google.com

PROFILE FRESHNESS AND THE "30-DAY DORMANCY" CLAIM – CONTINUED

Sources: Google local ranking tips · Google Business Profile posts guidance

COMPLIANCE ACTION PLAN

Immediate stop list & safe replacements.

Stop these practices now, then replace them with neutral, non-selective review requests sent to every eligible customer.

- × Asking customers to mention a staff member by name.
- × Asking customers to include specific keywords, services, locations, or phrases.
- × Asking for five-star reviews.
- × Running staff quotas for review count.
- × Running contests or bonuses tied to review count, rating, or staff mentions.
- × Sending Google review links only to happy customers.
- × Offering discounts, gifts, loyalty points, refunds, or drawing entries tied to reviews.
- × Asking customers to change or remove negative reviews for compensation.
- × Using store-owned tablets or kiosks for Google review collection.
- × Having staff stand over customers while they leave reviews.
- × Posting fake owner, employee, friend, family, or vendor reviews.
- × Reusing scripts that create repetitive review patterns.

SAFE SMS

Thank you for choosing [Business Name]. We value honest feedback from all customers. You can share your experience on Google here: [Review Link]

SAFE IN-PERSON

Thank you for coming in today. We send all customers the same feedback link after their visit. Honest feedback is always appreciated.

SAFE QR CARD

Share honest feedback about your experience. Google review link: [QR code]

ACTION PLAN – CONTINUED

NEVER USE LANGUAGE LIKE

- Please leave us a 5-star review.
- Mention me / mention the service we performed.
- Use the phrase “best [service] in [city].”
- Show your review for a discount.
- Only leave a review if you had a great experience.
- The employee with the most reviews wins.
- We need each staff member to get 10 reviews this month.

INTERNAL AUDIT

Compliance checklist.

Run this across all locations, agencies, CRMs, and staff-training materials.

REVIEW SOLICITATION

- No star-rating requests.
- No keyword / service / location wording requests.
- No staff contests tied to reviews.
- No customer pre-screening before review requests.
- No incentives tied to leaving/changing/removing reviews.
- No staff-name requests.
- No review quotas.
- No bonuses tied to review count, rating, or staff mentions.
- Same neutral request to all eligible customers.
- No in-office tablet/kiosk collection.

CRM / AUTOMATION

- SMS templates reviewed.
- Post-visit automation reviewed.
- Survey flows reviewed for gating.
- Agency/vendor templates reviewed.
- Email templates reviewed.
- Negative-feedback flows reviewed.
- Review links sent neutrally and consistently.
- Franchise/location templates reviewed.

STAFF TRAINING

- Staff know they may not request specific wording.
- Staff know they may not pressure customers on premises.
- Managers understand quotas/contests are prohibited.
- Staff know they may not ask for staff-name mentions.
- Staff understand incentives are prohibited.
- Escalation exists for negative feedback without suppressing public access.

GBP CONTENT

- Name matches real-world name.
- Hours + holiday hours current.
- Appointment/contact links current.
- Stock/fake/manipulated images removed.
- Categories accurate.
- Services/products current.
- Photos real and accurate.
- Review replies professional and non-coercive.

LEGAL / FTC

- Consumer Review Rule policy reviewed by counsel.
- Employee/family/vendor review rules documented.
- Complaint/feedback workflows reviewed for suppression risk.
- Insider-review disclosure policy exists.
- Incentive programs reviewed.
- Evidence of compliance retained.

METHOD & SOURCES

Source index & takeaway.

Every cited source, grouped by authority tier. Verdicts above are drawn from official Google and U.S. federal materials, with industry reporting flagged as secondary.

OFFICIAL GOOGLE**Prohibited & restricted content**

<https://support.google.com/business/answer/7400114?hl=en>

Business Profile restrictions for policy violations

https://support.google.com/business/answer/14114287?hl=en&ref_topic=4596755

Maps UGC — Consumer Alerts

https://support.google.com/contributionpolicy/answer/15178562?hl=en&ref_topic=7422769

Maps UGC — Removed and rejected content

https://support.google.com/contributionpolicy/answer/13780397?hl=en&ref_topic=7422769

Tips to get more reviews

<https://support.google.com/business/answer/3474122?hl=en>

Tips to improve local ranking

<https://support.google.com/business/answer/7091?hl=en>

Create and manage posts

<https://support.google.com/business/answer/7342169?hl=en>

Tips for high-quality media

<https://support.google.com/contributionpolicy/answer/7411351?hl=en>

Product Studio for Business Profile

<https://support.google.com/business/answer/15627395?hl=en>

My Business Q&A API changelog

<https://developers.google.com/my-business/content/qanda/change-log>

Blog — Ask Maps & immersive navigation

<https://blog.google/products-and-platforms/products/maps/ask-maps-immersive-navigation/>

Blog — Protecting businesses on Maps

<https://blog.google/products-and-platforms/products/maps/new-ways-were-protecting-businesses-on-maps/>

Search Status Dashboard — Dec 2025 core update

<https://status.search.google.com/incidents/DsirqJ1gpPRgVQeccPRv>

Search Central — core updates

<https://developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/core-updates>

OFFICIAL FTC / LEGAL**FTC press release — warns 10 companies**

<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2025/12/ftc-warns-10-companies-about-possible-violations-agencys-new-consumer-review-rule>

FTC business blog — warning letters

<https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/blog/2025/12/warning-letter-or-ten-businesses-comply-ftcs-consumer-review-rule>

FTC warning-letter template (PDF)

https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/ftc_gov/pdf/2025-Fake-Review-Warning-Template.pdf

eCFR — Consumer Review Rule, 16 CFR Part 465

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-16/chapter-I/subchapter-D/part-465>

eCFR — 16 CFR § 1.98 penalty adjustments

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-16/chapter-I/subchapter-A/part-1/subpart-L/section-1.98>

FTC — Enforcement Authority

<https://www.ftc.gov/about-ftc/mission/enforcement-authority>

FTC — Consumer Reviews Rule: what businesses need to know

<https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/consumer-reviews-rule-what-businesses-need-know>

METHOD & SOURCES — CONTINUED

INDUSTRY / SECONDARY

Search Engine Roundtable — Q&A → Ask

<https://www.seroundtable.com/google-maps-qa-feature-ask-40594.html>

Search Engine Roundtable — staff mentions & solicitation

<https://www.seroundtable.com/google-reviews-policy-staff-mentions-solicitations-41175.html>

PPC Land — staff names & quotas now banned

<https://ppc.land/google-tightens-maps-review-policy-staff-names-and-quotas-now-banned/>

GMBapi — reviews deleted: AI & legal takedowns

<https://gmbapi.com/news/google-reviews-deleted-ai-legal-takedowns/>

ALM Corp — reviews deleted 2025

<https://almcorp.com/blog/google-reviews-deleted-ai-legal-takedowns-2025/>

THE SAFEST OPERATING MODEL

- Ask every eligible customer neutrally; do not filter by sentiment.

- Do not request specific wording, keywords, staff names, or ratings.

- Do not incentivize reviews, set staff quotas, or run contests.

- Do not collect reviews on company-controlled tablets or under staff supervision.

- Keep Business Profile content accurate, current, and authentic; use real photos.

- Treat FTC review-compliance as a legal-risk issue, not just an SEO issue.
