



ReplyProof

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The State of Google Reviews for Local Businesses: 2026

3,844 businesses | 15 industries | 13 U.S. cities

3,844

businesses analyzed

15

industries

13

U.S. cities

4.79

avg star rating

**The real differentiator is profile activity:
who responds to reviews, who posts, who looks alive.**

Methodology

Data collected via Google Places API (New), March through April 2026.

3,844 businesses across 13 cities and 15 industry categories.

Review counts, star ratings, and website presence captured at time of survey.

External research cited inline from BrightLocal, Harvard, Cornell, Northwestern, Whitespark, and SOCi.



Published by **ReplyProof**

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KEY FINDINGS

What 3,844 businesses and the latest research reveal

2,346

median reviews for restaurants, the highest of any vertical. Higher volume means more visible complaints and a lower baseline rating to absorb the damage.

88%

of consumers would use a business that responds to reviews. Only 47% would consider a business that never responds. (BrightLocal, 2024)

13.1%

of auto repair shops have no website. That is more than 10x the rate of dentists. For those shops, Google reviews are their entire online presence.

5 to 9%

revenue increase per one-star improvement in online rating for independent businesses. (Harvard Business School, 2016)

68%

of consumers now require 4+ stars before using a business, up from 55% in 2025. The bar is rising every year. (BrightLocal, 2026)

32%

of local pack ranking weight comes from Google Business Profile signals, the #1 factor. Review velocity now matters more than total count. (Whitespark, 2026)

334

median reviews across all 3,844 businesses. The gap between mean (857) and median reveals a long tail: most businesses have moderate counts, a few dominate.

4.2 to 4.5

stars is the purchase probability sweet spot. Consumers view perfect 5.0 ratings as "too good to be true." Our data shows average ratings of 4.45 to 4.91 across verticals. (Northwestern, 2017)

19%

of consumers expect a same-day response to their review, up from 6% in 2025. Another 32% want a response by the next day. Speed matters. (BrightLocal, 2026)

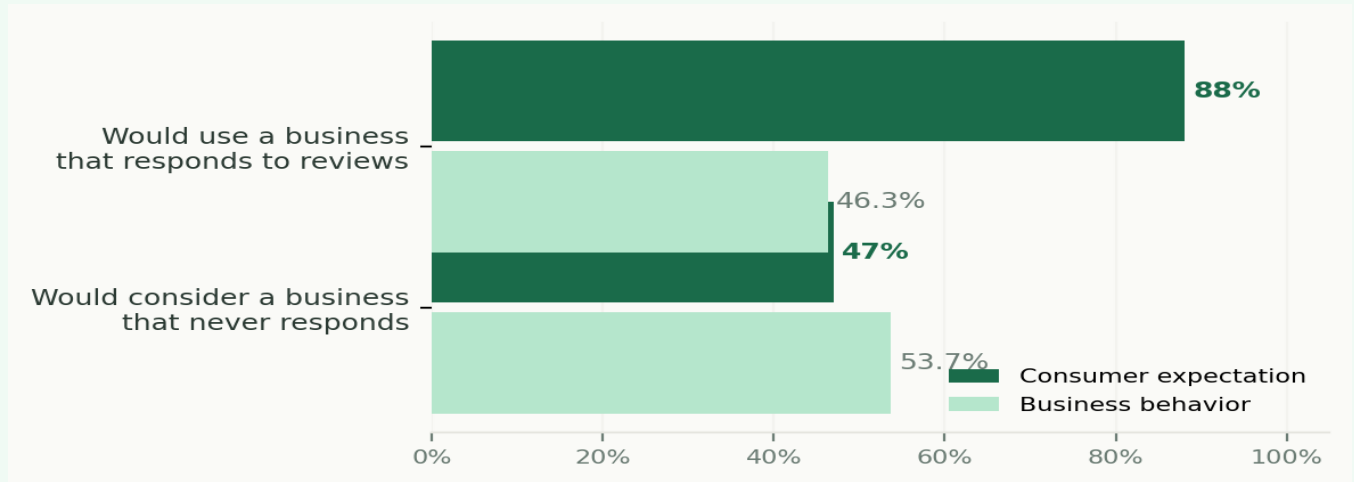
0.6%

of all businesses have fewer than 10 reviews. These are the most vulnerable profiles, where every single review carries outsized weight on the overall rating.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Response Gap

Most consumers expect businesses to respond to their reviews. Most businesses don't. This gap is not a problem. It is a market opportunity for every business willing to show up.



Sources: BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey, 2024. SOCi Local SEO Statistics, 2024.

88% vs 47%

The gap between consumers who'd use a responsive business versus one that never responds. That is a 41-point swing in consideration rate, driven entirely by whether someone replies to reviews. (BrightLocal, 2024)

Revenue follows responses

Revenue increases as review response rate increases, but diminishing returns set in after roughly 40% of reviews are answered. Responding to negatives matters more than responding to positives. (Cornell, 2016)

4.1% per 25%

For every 25% of reviews responded to, Google Business Profile conversion improves by 4.1%. The average multi-location brand responds to 46.3% of reviews. (SOCi, 2024)

THE BUSINESS CASE

The Revenue Math

Harvard Business School research found that a one-star increase in online rating leads to a 5 to 9% revenue increase for independent businesses (Luca, 2016). Cornell research found that a one-point reputation improvement makes consumers 13.5% more likely to book (Anderson, 2012). Here is what that looks like for three common local business types.

Business Type	Est. Annual Revenue	2.5% Gain (0.5 star)	ROI vs \$200/mo
Dental Practice	\$800,000	\$20,000	8x return
HVAC Company	\$1,200,000	\$30,000	12x return
Med Spa	\$600,000	\$15,000	6x return

Assumes conservative 5% revenue increase per full star (Luca, 2016). Half-star improvement = 2.5% gain.
Annual cost of review management: \$200/mo x 12 = \$2,400.

These numbers are conservative. The Harvard study found effects up to 9% per star for independent restaurants. Cornell found that a one-point increase on a 5-point scale drives a 1.42% increase in revenue per available unit for hospitality businesses. The actual ROI of active review management likely exceeds these estimates.

Even a half-star improvement pays for itself many times over.

Northwestern research adds another dimension: purchase likelihood peaks between 4.2 and 4.5 stars and actually decreases toward 5.0. Consumers view perfect ratings as suspicious. Our data shows most verticals average between 4.45 and 4.91 stars, right in the zone where active management matters most. (Northwestern/Spiegel, 2017)

What Google Actually Rewards

Google ranks local businesses on three factors: relevance, distance, and prominence. You can't control distance. Relevance depends on your category and keywords. Prominence is where review management makes the difference. Google's own documentation states that prominence is "partly based on review count and review score."

1

GBP Signals 32%

Categories, keywords, proximity, hours, photos, posts, Q&A completeness

2

Review Signals Key factor

Review count, review velocity (steady flow), star rating, review content, owner responses

3

On-Page Signals Supporting

NAP consistency, domain authority, location pages, schema markup

4

Behavioral Signals Rising fast

Click-through rate, calls, direction requests, engagement with posts and photos

5

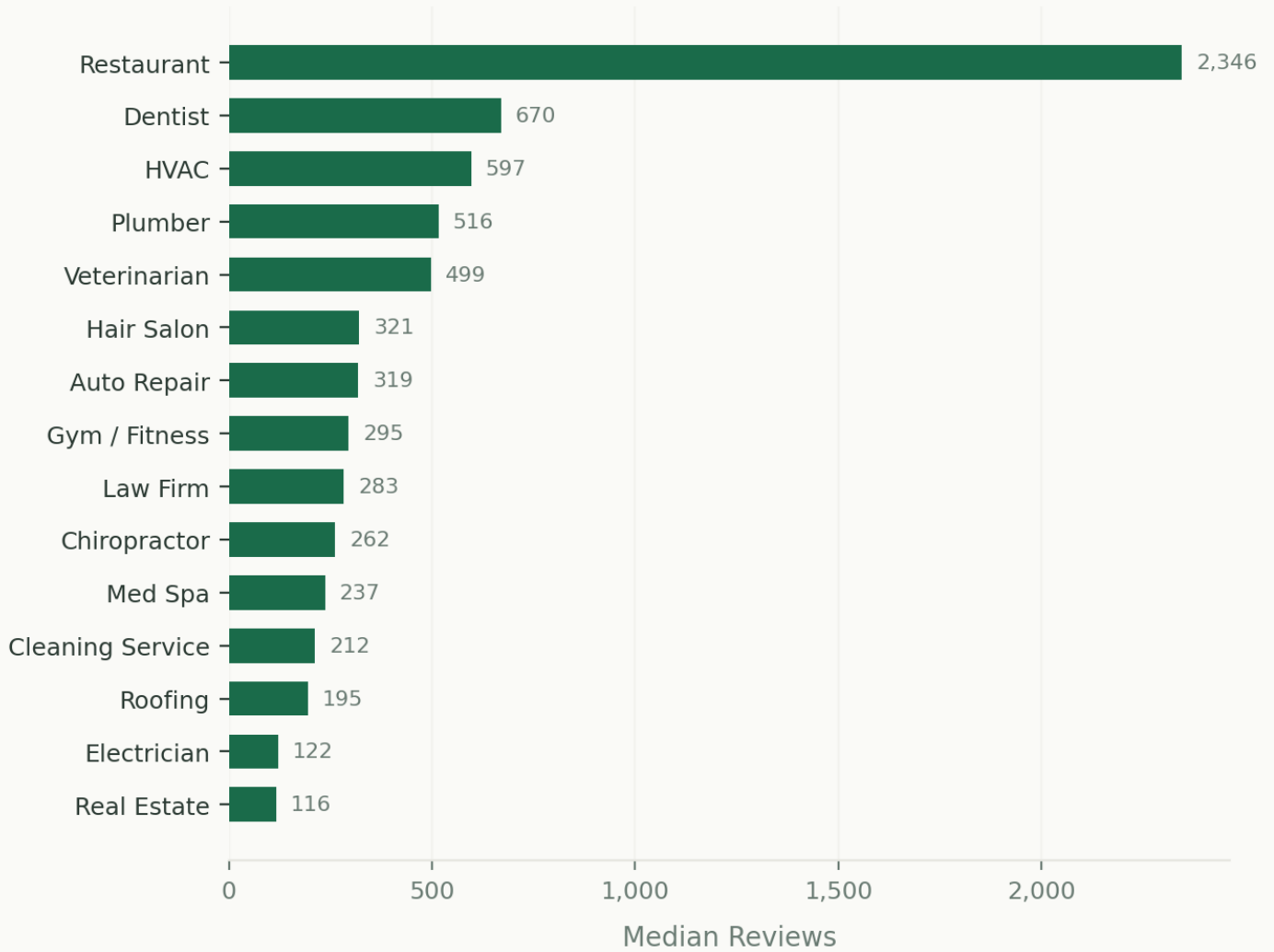
Link Signals Supporting

Quality backlinks, local citation consistency, authority of linking domains

Sources: Whitespark Local Search Ranking Factors, 2026. Google Business Profile Help Documentation.

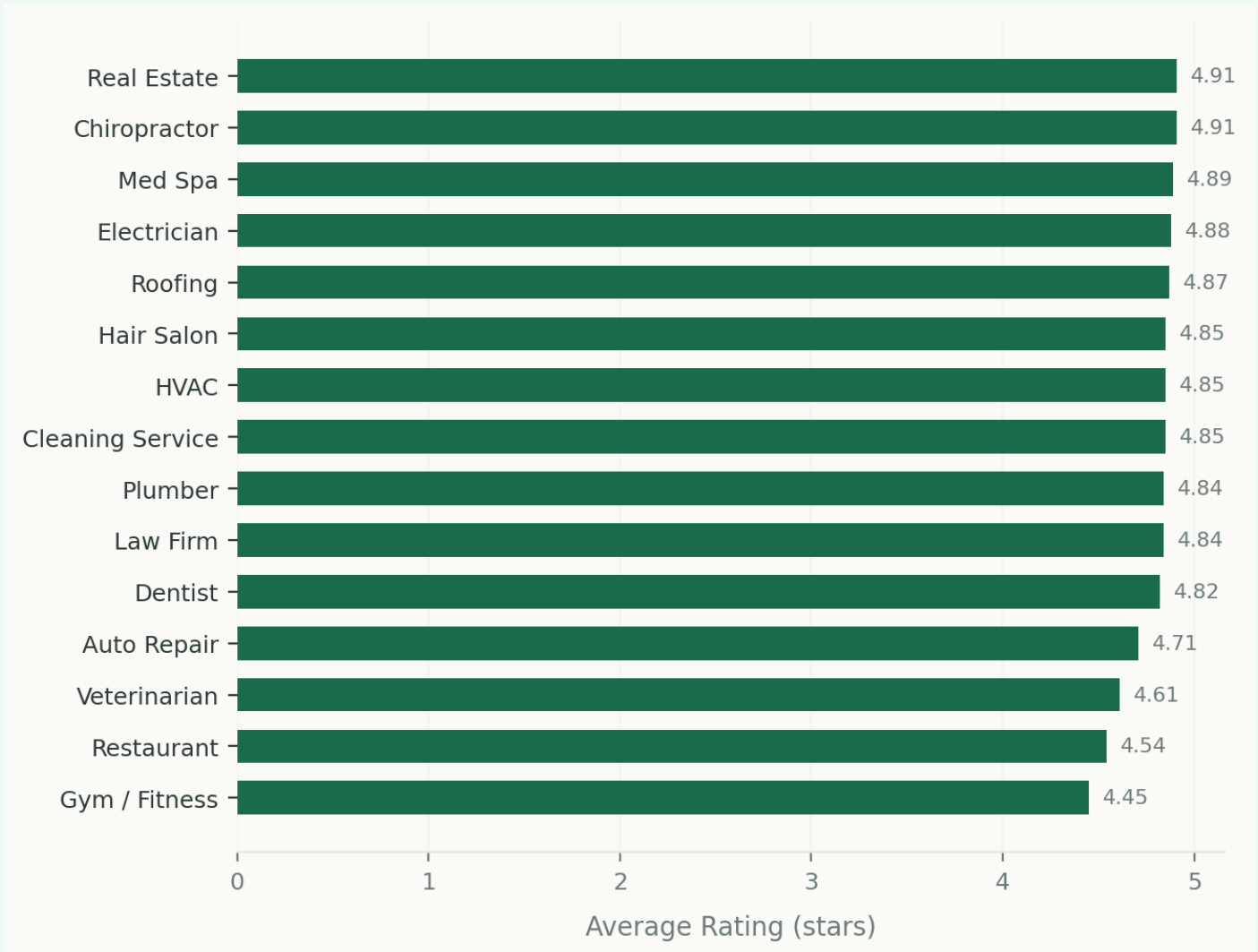
Businesses in the Google 3-pack receive 126% more traffic and 93% more actions (calls, directions, website clicks) than positions 4 through 10. Review velocity, meaning a steady flow of new reviews, now outperforms total review volume as a ranking signal. Google rewards businesses that look alive. (SOCi, 2024; Whitespark, 2026)

Median Google Reviews by Vertical



Source: ReplyProof analysis of 3,844 businesses via Google Places API, March to April 2026.

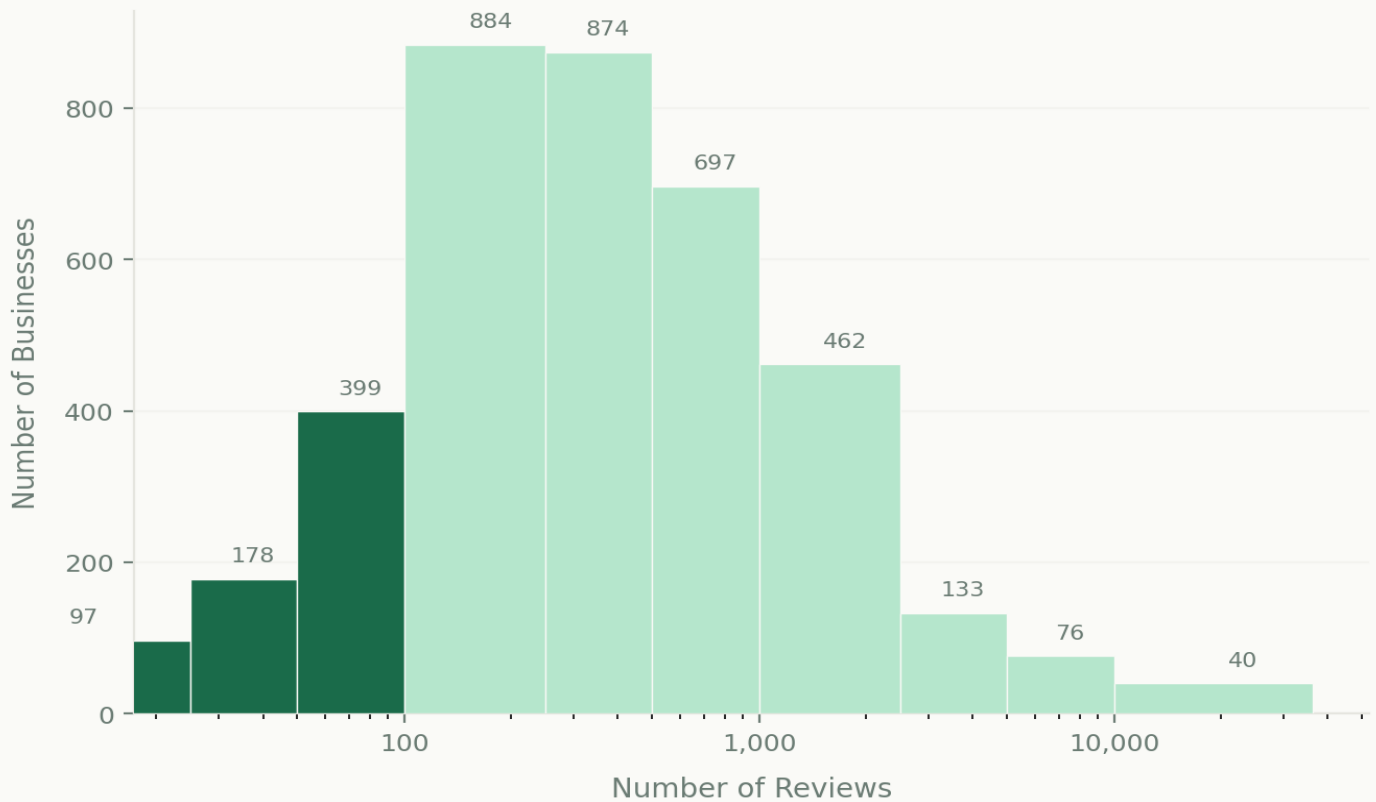
Average Star Rating by Vertical



Source: ReplyProof analysis of 3,844 businesses via Google Places API, March to April 2026.

Review Count Distribution

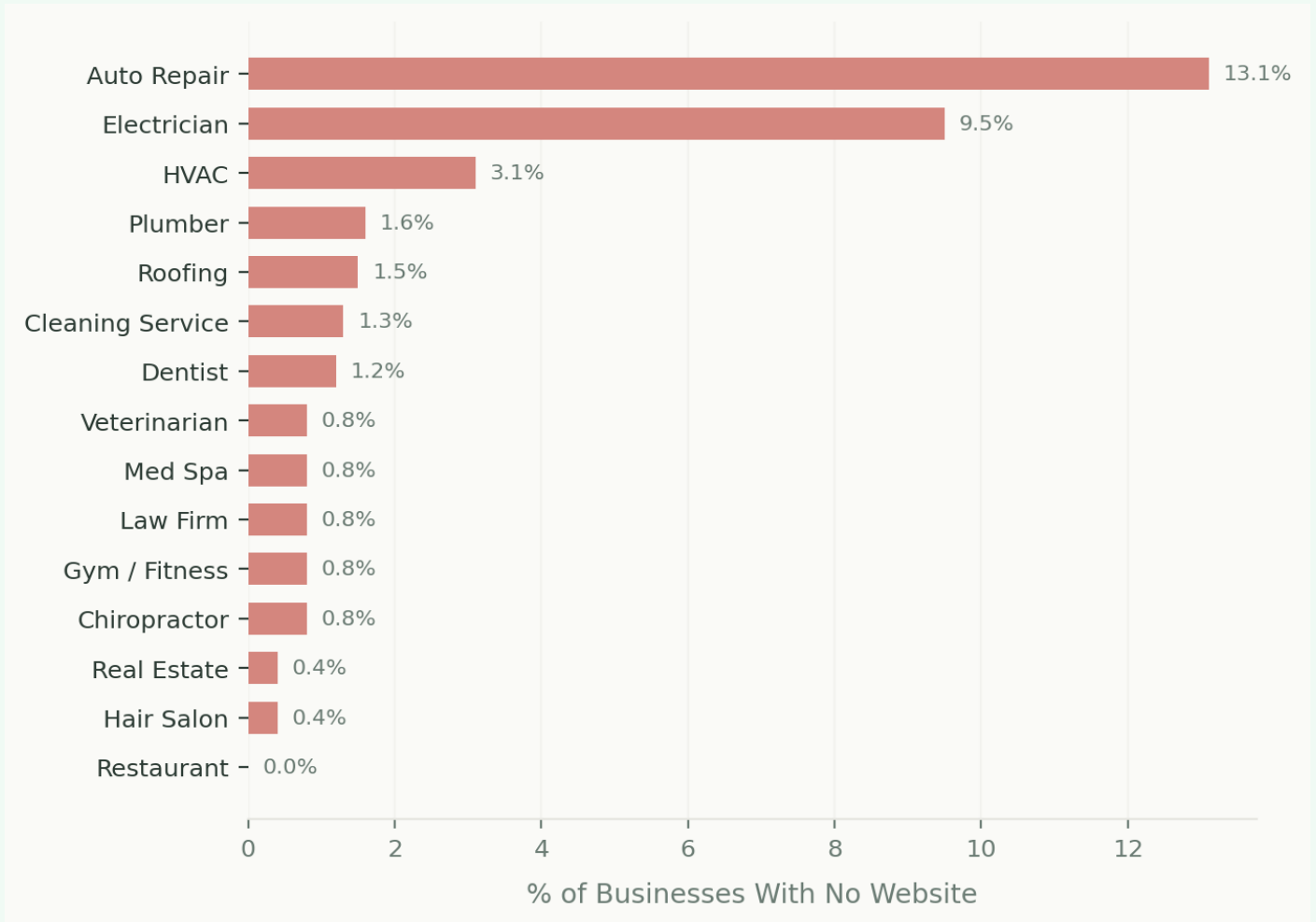
The distribution of review counts across all 3,844 businesses reveals a long tail. Most businesses have moderate review counts, while a small number of high-volume businesses pull the average far above the median. The businesses at the low end are the most vulnerable: where every single review shifts the overall rating.



Source: ReplyProof analysis of 3,844 businesses via Google Places API, March to April 2026.

The Website Gap

For businesses without a website, their Google Business Profile is their entire online presence. An unmanaged profile doesn't just miss opportunities. It actively drives customers to competitors. The stakes of leaving reviews unanswered are even higher when there is no website to fall back on.



Source: ReplyProof analysis of 3,844 businesses via Google Places API, March to April 2026.

How Each Vertical Compares

Restaurant

2,346 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.54 avg stars | 3,880 avg reviews | 0.0% no website

Restaurants collect more reviews than any other local business category by a wide margin. With a median of 2,346 reviews, the sheer volume means every response (or lack of one) is visible to thousands of potential diners. The average rating of 4.54 is the second lowest of any vertical, driven by the emotional nature of dining experiences and high customer expectations.



Dentist

670 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.82 avg stars | 782 avg reviews | 1.2% no website

Dental practices sit in the middle of the pack on volume but carry high stakes per review. The average patient lifetime value makes each reviewer worth thousands in potential referrals. At 1.2% with no website, most practices have an online presence, but their GBP is still the first thing prospective patients see.



HVAC

597 median reviews

259 businesses | 4.85 avg stars | 2,003 avg reviews | 3.1% no website

HVAC companies show the widest gap between average (2,003) and median (597) review counts, meaning a small number of dominant players skew the average while most companies have moderate volumes. Emergency service searches ("AC broken") carry high intent, making GBP visibility critical during peak season.



Plumber

516 median reviews

254 businesses | 4.84 avg stars | 1,442 avg reviews | 1.6% no website

Plumbing follows a pattern similar to HVAC: high average (1,442) but lower median (516). Emergency searches dominate this vertical. When someone has a burst pipe at 2 AM, they pick the first plumber with strong reviews and recent activity. Response time to reviews signals responsiveness to customers.



Veterinarian

499 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.61 avg stars | 605 avg reviews | 0.8% no website

Pet owners are emotionally invested reviewers. Veterinary practices average 4.61 stars, the third lowest of any vertical, because pet health outcomes drive strong emotional responses. A single unaddressed negative review about a beloved pet can steer dozens of pet owners away.



Hair Salon

321 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.85 avg stars | 478 avg reviews | 0.4% no website

Hair salons have the lowest no-website rate at just 0.4%, reflecting the visual nature of the business. With a median of 321 reviews and 4.85 average stars, salons cluster tightly around high ratings. The differentiator is engagement: posting photos of work, responding to praise, addressing the occasional complaint.



Auto Repair

319 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.71 avg stars | 434 avg reviews | 13.1% no website

Auto repair leads all verticals with 13.1% of businesses having no website, more than 10x the rate of dentists or hair salons. For those shops, their Google Business Profile is their entire digital presence. An unmanaged profile doesn't just miss opportunities. It actively drives customers to competitors.



Gym / Fitness

295 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.45 avg stars | 545 avg reviews | 0.8% no website

Gyms and fitness centers carry the lowest average rating of any vertical at 4.45 stars. Billing disputes, cleanliness complaints, and contract frustrations drive negative reviews. Because gym memberships are recurring, one unaddressed complaint can represent years of lost revenue.



Law Firm

283 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.84 avg stars | 661 avg reviews | 0.8% no website

Law firms show a wide gap between average (661) and median (283) reviews, with a few high-volume personal injury firms pulling the average up. Most firms have moderate review counts. Trust is the entire purchase decision in legal services, and reviews are the first trust signal a prospect encounters.



Chiropractor

262 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.91 avg stars | 308 avg reviews | 0.8% no website

Chiropractors tie for the highest rating of any vertical at 4.91 stars with a median of 262 reviews. The recurring visit model means satisfied patients stack up reviews over time. Responding to the rare negative review is especially important when your rating is near-perfect.



Med Spa

237 median reviews

260 businesses | 4.89 avg stars | 337 avg reviews | 0.8% no website

Med spas cluster near the top on ratings (4.89 avg) with moderate review volume (237 median). High treatment values (\$800 to \$2,000+) mean each review represents significant revenue potential. Consumers researching cosmetic procedures read reviews more carefully and expect detailed, professional responses.



Cleaning Service

212 median reviews

232 businesses | 4.85 avg stars | 312 avg reviews | 1.3% no website

Cleaning services average 4.85 stars with a median of 212 reviews. Trust is paramount since customers are inviting these businesses into their homes. At 1.3% without a website, most have an online presence, but the GBP profile is where the trust-building happens first.



Roofing

195 median reviews

259 businesses | 4.87 avg stars | 308 avg reviews | 1.5% no website

Roofing contractors average 4.87 stars with a median of 195 reviews. High job values (\$5,000 to \$15,000+) mean each review carries significant weight in the purchase decision. Storm season drives spikes in search volume, and the businesses with the freshest, most active profiles win those high-intent searches.



Electrician

122 median reviews

242 businesses | 4.88 avg stars | 430 avg reviews | 9.5% no website

Electricians have the second-highest no-website rate at 9.5% and the lowest median review count after real estate at just 122. This vertical has the most room for improvement: a business that actively manages its GBP stands out dramatically from competitors who don't.



Real Estate

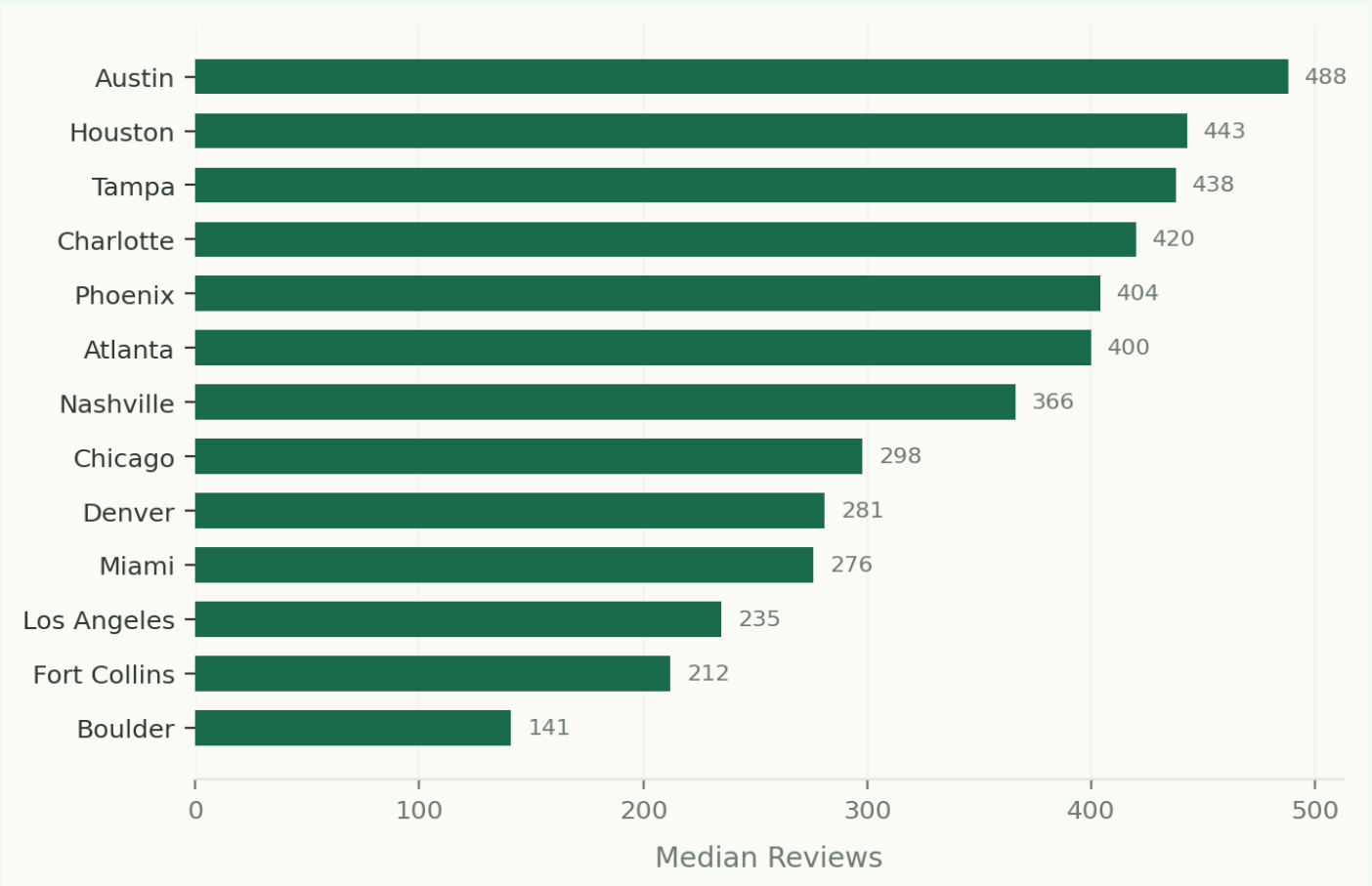
116 median reviews

258 businesses | 4.91 avg stars | 252 avg reviews | 0.4% no website

Real estate agents have the lowest median review count of any vertical at 116, reflecting the individual-agent nature of the business. Average rating is tied for highest at 4.91. With only 0.4% lacking a website, agents are digitally savvy, but many neglect their GBP entirely.



Median Reviews by City

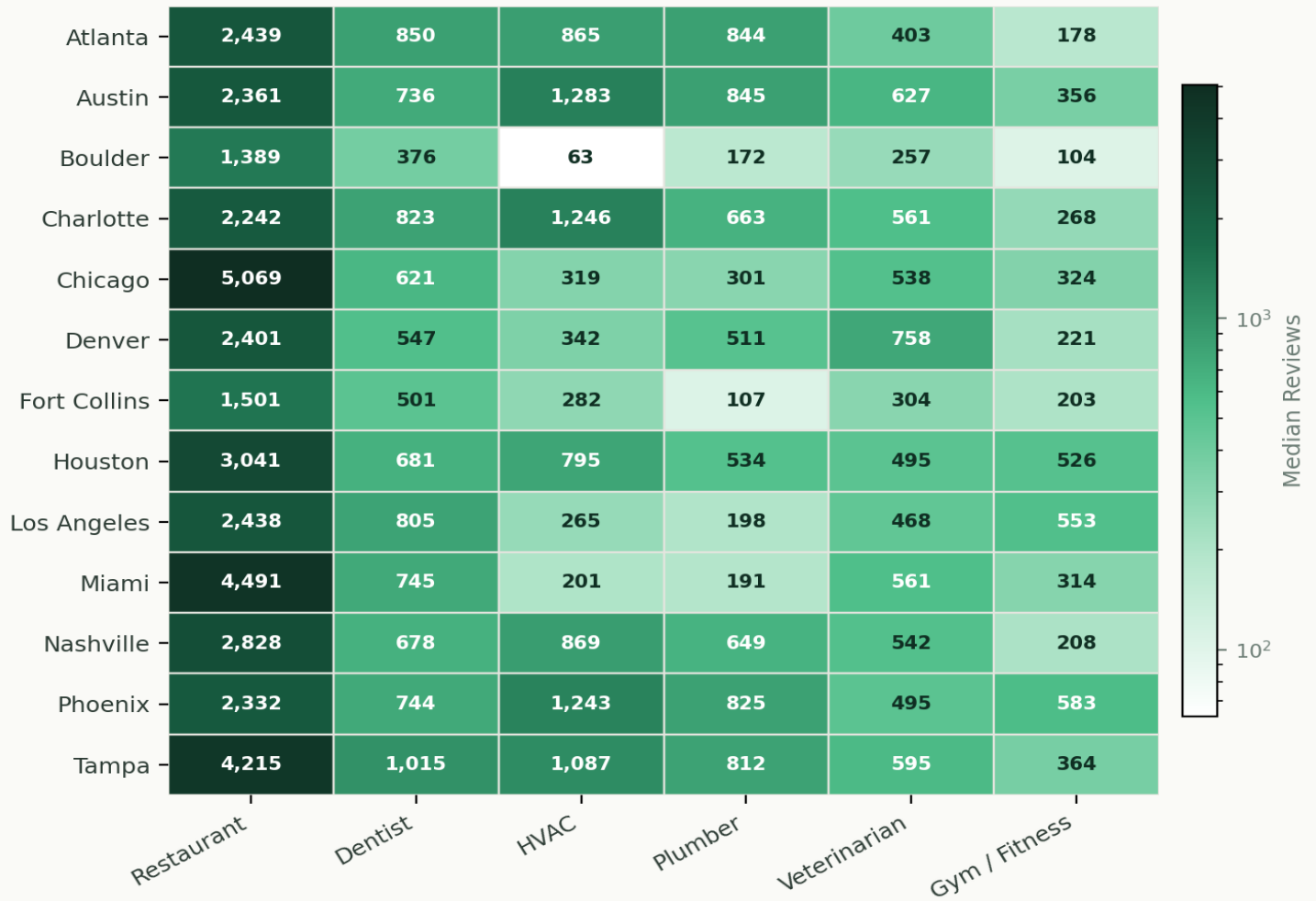


Source: ReplyProof analysis of 3,844 businesses via Google Places API, March to April 2026.

Austin leads with a median of 488 reviews, while Boulder has the lowest at 141. Smaller markets tend to have lower review volumes, which means each review carries more weight. A business in Boulder with 50 reviews faces more rating volatility than a business in Austin with 500.

Median Reviews: City x Industry

This heatmap shows median review counts across 13 cities and 6 high-volume industries. Darker cells indicate higher review competition. Markets with the lightest cells represent the biggest opportunities: fewer reviews needed to stand out.



Source: ReplyProof analysis of 3,844 businesses via Google Places API, March to April 2026.

Three Things You Can Do This Week

You don't need to overhaul your entire marketing strategy. These three steps take less than an hour total and will immediately improve how your business appears on Google.

1 Claim and complete your Google Business Profile

If you haven't claimed your profile yet, do it today at business.google.com. If you have, check that every field is filled: business description, hours, service areas, photos (at least 10), and categories. Customers are 2.7x more likely to consider a business reputable when they find a complete profile. (SOCi, 2024)

2 Respond to your 10 most recent reviews

Start with negative reviews first. Acknowledge the issue, apologize without being defensive, and offer to make it right. Then respond to positive reviews with a specific thank you (not just "Thanks for the review!"). 88% of consumers say they'd use a business that responds to reviews. The bar is low: just start responding. (BrightLocal, 2024)

3 Post one update to your profile this week

Share a photo from your business, announce a seasonal service, or highlight a customer win. Google rewards businesses that post regularly. It signals that your profile is active and your business is open for customers. One post per week is a good starting rhythm. Businesses that "look alive" outperform set-it-and-forget-it profiles in local search. (Whitespark, 2026)



About ReplyProof

We handle Google reviews, posts, photos, and Q&A for local businesses so owners never think about it again.

\$200/month. No contracts. Cancel anytime.

One dedicated team member who knows your business.

Get a free profile audit

We will review your Google Business Profile and send you a custom report showing exactly where you stand and what to fix first. No pitch, no pressure.

[Get Started Now → \\$200/mo](#)

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This report was produced by ReplyProof using data from the Google Places API (New) and published third-party research. All sources are cited inline.

For questions about methodology or findings, contact hello@replyproof.co.