

The North Atlanta Review Economy Study

What Consumer Research and Local Search Data Reveal About How Gwinnett and Forsyth County Residents Choose Local Businesses Online — and What a Single Star, 10 New Reviews, or One Unanswered Review Is Actually Worth in Dollars

Prepared by Make It Loud Digital Marketing Serving Gwinnett, Forsyth, Hall, Cherokee, and North Atlanta
makeitloud.net

Data Sources: BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2025 & 2026 | Whitespark 2026 Local Search Ranking Factors (N=47 expert SEOs, 187 factors) | SOCi Consumer Behavior Index 2024 | BrightLocal Click-Through Rate Study (Local Pack star rating vs. CTR) | Northwestern University Spiegel Research Center | Search Atlas 2025 Study (3,269 businesses) | Feedback Guru / ReplyOnTheFly 2026 Industry Benchmarks | Spokk 2025 / ReviewGen 2026 / Hook Agency 2026 Local Review Analysis

87%	+39%	20%	+44%
of consumers read reviews before choosing a local business (2026)	more Local Pack clicks for 5-star vs. 1-star businesses (BrightLocal)	of local ranking weight driven by review signals (Whitespark 2026)	GBP conversion lift from a single star rating increase (SOCi)

BOTTOM LINE: 87% of North Atlanta consumers read online reviews before choosing a local business. Review signals account for 20% of local search ranking weight — the second most influential factor after the Google Business Profile itself. A 5-star business earns 39% more clicks in the Local Map Pack than a 1-star business. Every 10 new reviews improves a GBP's conversion rate by 2.8%. Every star of average rating improvement drives a 44% increase in GBP conversions. And 47% of consumers in 2026 say they won't use a business with fewer than 20 reviews — regardless of how good the business actually is. Reviews are not a reputation management nicety. They are the primary mechanism by which North Atlanta consumers decide which business to call.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The local review economy in North Atlanta is not a peripheral marketing concern. It is the primary filtering mechanism through which consumers in Gwinnett, Forsyth, Hall, Cherokee, and the broader North Atlanta market decide which plumber to call, which dentist to book, which roofer to trust, and which restaurant to try on a Friday night. BrightLocal's 2026 Local Consumer Review Survey found that 87% of consumers read reviews before choosing a local business. The number of consumers who will not use a business with fewer than 20 reviews has grown to 47% — up significantly year over year. And 31% of consumers in 2026 will only use a business with 4.5 stars or higher, nearly doubling from 17% in 2025.

The research infrastructure behind these consumer behaviors is substantial. Whitespark's 2026 Local Search Ranking Factors survey — the most authoritative annual benchmark in local SEO, based on 47 expert practitioners scoring 187 individual signals — found that review signals account for 20% of local ranking weight, second only to Google Business Profile completeness (32%). Combined, GBP and reviews account for more than half of all controllable local ranking influence. SOCi's Consumer Behavior Index analysis of thousands of GBP profiles found that a single star of average rating improvement drives a 44% increase in GBP conversion actions — calls, direction requests, and website clicks. Every 10 new

reviews improves that conversion rate by an additional 2.8%. Every 25% increase in review response rate adds another 4.1% to conversions.

This study applies that national research data to the North Atlanta local business market, establishes industry-specific benchmarks for the categories most relevant to the Gwinnett and Forsyth business community, and documents the specific actions that translate review investment into measurable revenue impact.

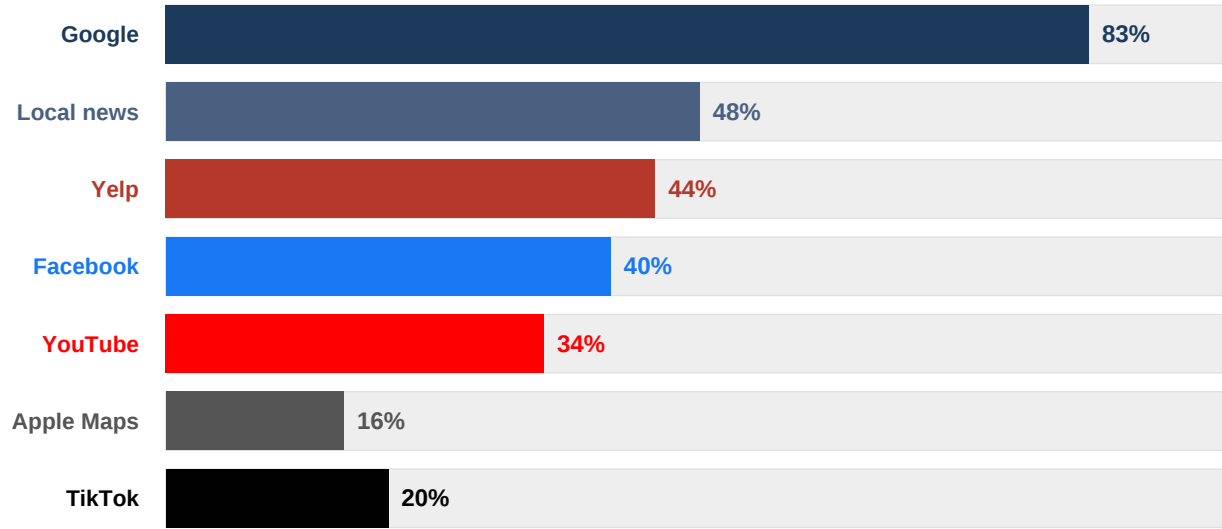
Finding 1

Google Is Where 83% of North Atlanta Consumers Read Reviews — and That Share Is Growing

83% use Google for reviews (2025, up from 81% in 2024)

BrightLocal's 2025 Local Consumer Review Survey found that 83% of consumers use Google to read reviews about local businesses — up from 81% in 2024 and back above the 2023 level, reversing a brief dip. Google is not merely the dominant review platform; it is functionally the only review platform that matters for most North Atlanta businesses making a first impression on a new customer. The gap between Google and the next most-used platforms (local news sites at 48%, Yelp at 44%, Facebook at 40%) is substantial and widening. Facebook's share has declined consistently since 2022, while Yelp has stabilized at a lower level than its historic peak. Google hosts approximately 73% of all online reviews, and 81% of consumers check Google reviews before visiting a business in person. The practical implication for a Gwinnett County HVAC company, law firm, dental practice, or restaurant is straightforward: if your review strategy is distributed equally across Google, Facebook, and Yelp, you are spending two-thirds of your effort on platforms that matter one-third as much. Google reviews are where the game is played. The supporting platforms — Yelp, Facebook, and emerging options like Apple Maps and Trustpilot — matter as secondary signals, but they do not replace the Google Business Profile review count as the primary trust mechanism for local search.

Where North Atlanta Consumers Read Reviews About Local Businesses (2025)



(Sixth City Marketing; some studies report 57-58% depending on methodology).
(SurfSigma 2025 citing BrightLocal). Google hosts approximately 73% of all online reviews
Note: 74% of consumers check at least 2 review sites before making a purchase decision
reviews for local businesses. Google (83%) is the dominant platform by a wide margin.
Source: BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2025. % of consumers who use each platform to read

BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2025. Platform use question: 'Which of the following websites do you use to read reviews for local businesses?' (Multiple response.) Google 83%; local news 48%; Yelp 44%; Facebook 40%; YouTube 34%; TikTok 20%; Apple Maps 16%; Trustpilot 10%. 74% of consumers check at least 2 review sites before purchase decision (SurfSigma 2025 citing BrightLocal).

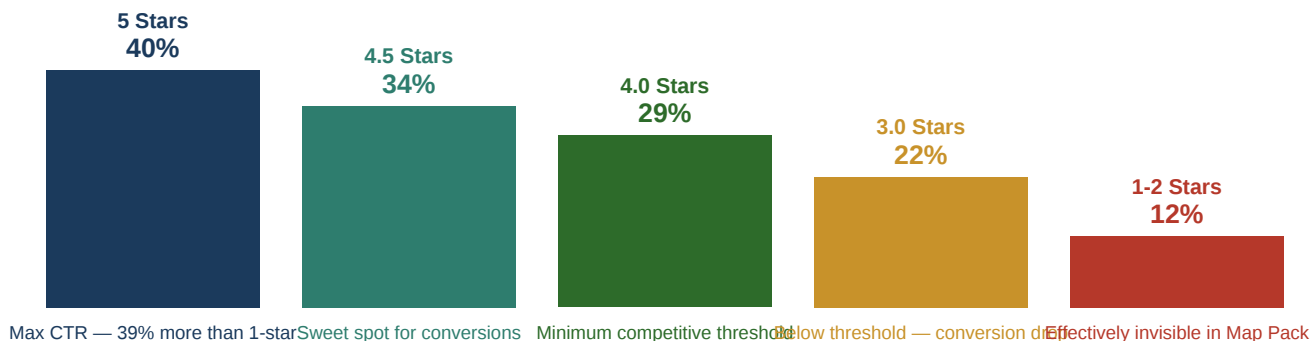
Finding 2

Star Ratings Drive 39% More Clicks in the Local Pack — and the Sweet Spot Is 4.2 to 4.5 Stars

5-star: 39% more Local Pack clicks than 1-star (BrightLocal CTR Study)

BrightLocal's Local Pack click-through rate study — which tested consumer behavior across variations of Map Pack results with different star ratings — found that a 5-star rating earns approximately 39% more clicks than a 1-star rating from the same Map Pack position. Moving from 3 stars to 5 stars produces approximately 25% more clicks. The click differential between star rating levels is the most direct revenue mechanism in the review economy: more clicks from the same Map Pack position means more calls, more bookings, and more revenue from the same advertising or SEO investment. The Map Pack Position 1 listing receives approximately 23.6% of all clicks from a local search result (FirstPageSage 2025). The implications of the star-CTR relationship compound with ranking: a business in Position 1 with a 4.5-star rating is not just getting more clicks than Position 2 — it is also earning significantly more clicks than a Position 1 business with a 3-star rating. Northwestern University's Spiegel Research Center research identifies the optimal trust range as 4.2 to 4.5 stars — not a perfect 5.0, which consumers frequently perceive as too good to be credible or insufficiently reviewed. A 5.0 average on fewer than 10 reviews triggers skepticism; a 4.4 average on 85 reviews builds confidence. The goal for North Atlanta businesses is not a perfect score — it is a credible, well-reviewed score in the 4.2-4.6 range with consistent volume and recency.

Local Pack CTR by Star Rating — How Reviews Drive Clicks



Optimal conversion range: 4.2–4.5 stars per Northwestern University Spiegel Research Center.
5-star businesses earn approximately 39% more Local Pack clicks than 1-star businesses (BrightLocal).
CTR figures from BrightLocal Click-Through Study (Local Pack star rating vs. CTR analysis).

CTR by star rating from BrightLocal Local Pack CTR Study (tested across plumbers, florists, and realtors). 5-star earns ~39% more clicks than 1-star in Map Pack; 5-star earns ~16% more clicks than 1-star in organic results. Optimal conversion range 4.2-4.5 stars: Northwestern University Spiegel Research Center. Map Pack Position 1 CTR 23.6%: FirstPageSage 2025.

The 4.0 Floor: 57% of consumers will skip a business rated below 4.0 stars entirely — without reading a single review. At 3.5 stars or below, consumers assume something is genuinely wrong with the business. For North Atlanta businesses sitting between 3.5 and 4.0 stars, every new positive review is not just reputation management — it is immediate click recovery.

Finding 3

Reviews Account for 20% of Local Search Ranking Weight — and Velocity Now Beats Volume

20% ranking weight (Whitespark 2026, 47 experts, 187 signals); recency in top 5

Whitespark's 2026 Local Search Ranking Factors survey — compiled from 47 expert local SEO practitioners scoring 187 individual ranking signals — found that review signals account for 20% of local search ranking influence, second only to Google Business Profile signals (32%). Combined, GBP and reviews account for more than half of all controllable local SEO weight. This is a significant increase from the 17% review signal weight documented in earlier Whitespark surveys, reflecting Google's increasing reliance on social proof signals as AI-powered local search expands. The most significant change in the 2026 data is the elevation of review recency as a top-5 ranking factor. Whitespark founder Darren Shaw specifically ranks Review Recency among his personal top 5 most important local ranking factors — a departure from earlier surveys where it ranked 20th. The practical implication is that review velocity now outweighs total review count in many competitive North Atlanta markets. A Gwinnett County roofing company with 120 reviews — all from 2022 — can be outranked by a competitor with 65 reviews that received 12 in the last 60 days. Search Atlas's 2025 study of 3,269 businesses confirmed review count as the second-highest ranking factor for local search at 19.2% weight and 26% for top-10 Map Pack spots. The algorithm favors active businesses that are continuously serving and satisfying customers — and fresh reviews are the signal it reads.

The Stale Review Problem: A North Atlanta business with 150 Google reviews earned over five years but zero in the last six months looks stale to both Google's algorithm and to the 32% of consumers who specifically want reviews from the last two weeks (BrightLocal 2026). Review velocity — a consistent flow of new reviews every month — is what separates a business that dominates its Map Pack from one that used to.

Finding 4

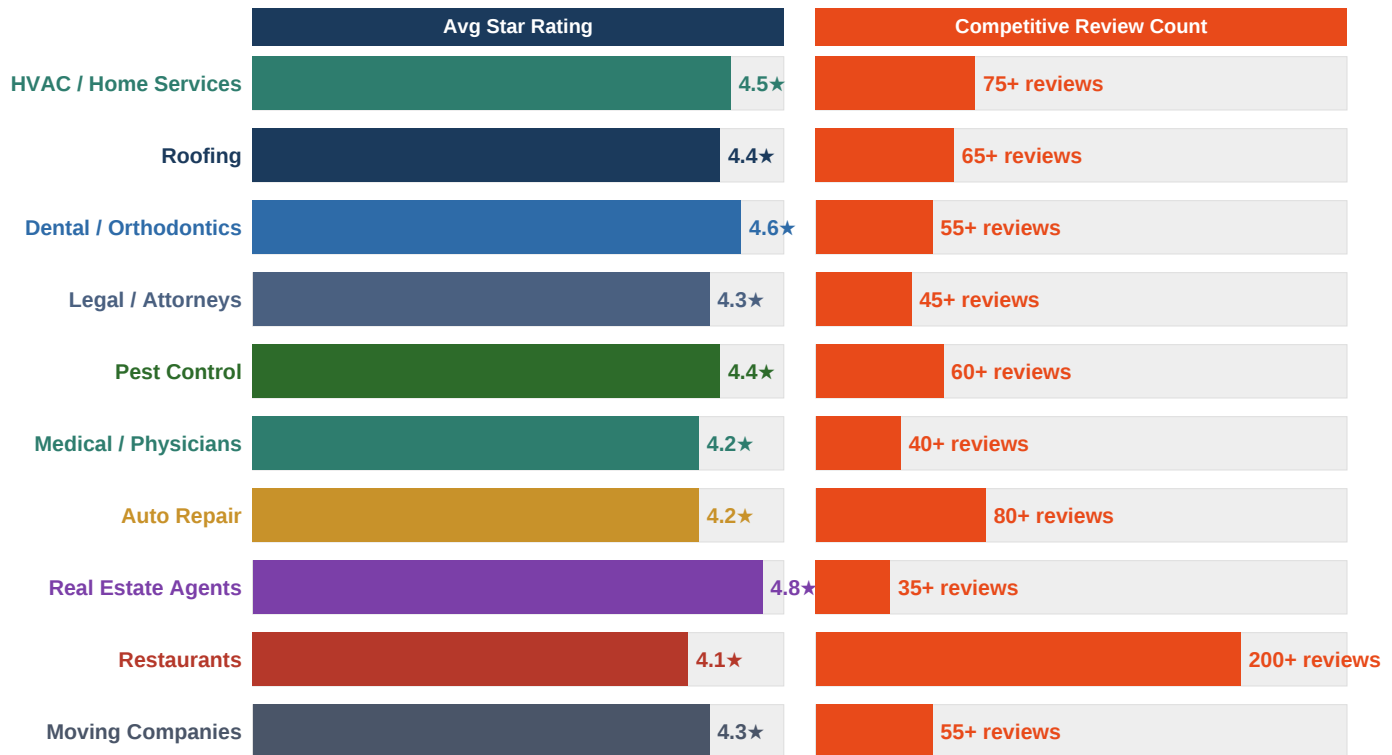
North Atlanta Industry Benchmarks: What Competitive Review Counts Look Like by Category

39 reviews: the average US local business (2025 analysis of 6,300+ businesses)

A 2025 analysis of 6,300+ businesses across 21 industries found that the average local business has just 39 Google reviews — a figure that masks significant variation by category. Restaurants average 120-300 reviews. Hotels average 309. Most home service businesses — roofing, HVAC, plumbing, pest control — have under 50. Legal services businesses typically range from 15 to 60, with the top performers reaching 80+. In a competitive North Atlanta market, 'competitive' means different things in different categories. The dental practice competing in Forsyth County needs to be above 55 reviews with a 4.5+ rating to be genuinely competitive. The HVAC company serving Gwinnett County needs 75+ reviews to be in the top tier. The roofing company needs both volume and recency — a storm season produces a natural influx of reviews from new customers, and companies that capitalize on that moment separate from those that don't. Star rating benchmarks also vary: HVAC and home services average 4.4-4.6 stars; restaurants average 4.0-4.2; healthcare averages 4.1; automotive averages 4.0. A dental practice with a 4.3 rating is below its industry average. An auto repair shop with a 4.3 rating is above average and highly competitive. Never benchmark your rating against a business in a different category.

North Atlanta Industry Benchmarks

Average Star Rating and Competitive Review Count by Category



(Hook Agency 2026; ReviewGen 2026; Spokk 2025 analysis of 3,269+ businesses).
 represent the threshold for top-3 Map Pack positioning in a competitive North Atlanta market
 (citing BrightLocal, SOCi, and Podium industry research). Competitive review counts
 Star rating benchmarks from ReplyOnTheFly 2026, Feedback Guru 2026, and Little Nudge 2026

Star rating averages: ReplyOnTheFly 2026, Feedback Guru 2026, Little Nudge 2026 (citing BrightLocal, SOCi, and Podium industry research). Competitive review count thresholds represent top-3 Map Pack positioning in competitive North Atlanta markets — smaller markets may require fewer reviews. Average of 39 reviews for local businesses: Maplift 2025 analysis of 6,300+ businesses.

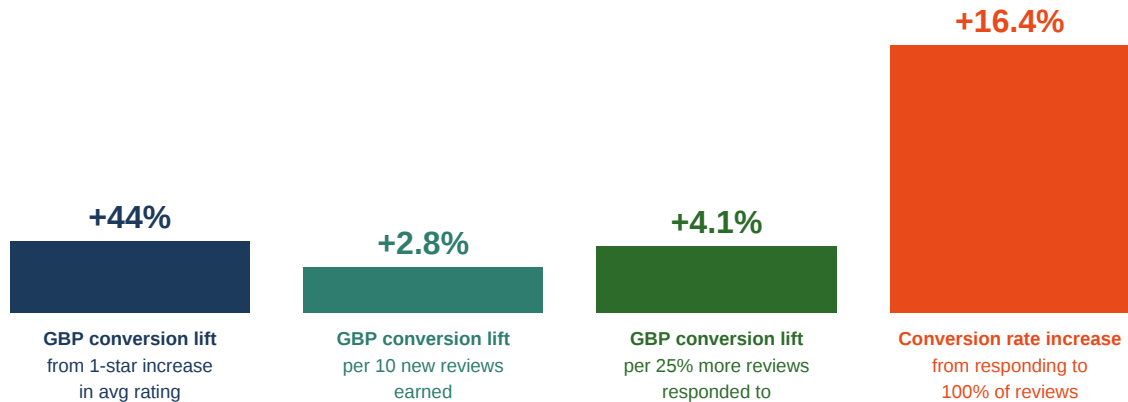
Finding 5

The Review Math: What Each New Review, Each Star, and Each Response Is Actually Worth

+2.8% GBP conversion per 10 new reviews; +44% per star (SOCi analysis)

SOCi's Consumer Behavior Index analysis of local business GBP performance provides the most specific quantification available of what review actions are actually worth in conversion terms. The findings: GBP conversions — defined as calls, direction requests, and website clicks — improve by 44% when a business increases its average star rating by one full star. Every 10 new reviews improves GBP conversion by 2.8%. Every 25% increase in review response rate improves GBP conversion by 4.1%. Responding to 100% of reviews — positive and negative — increases overall conversion rates by 16.4% compared to businesses that don't respond. To make these abstract percentages concrete for a North Atlanta business: if a Gwinnett County HVAC company currently generates 50 GBP conversion actions per month (calls + website clicks) at a 3.8-star average, raising to 4.8 stars would project to approximately 72 conversion actions — 22 additional monthly contact opportunities from the same Map Pack position. Adding 50 new reviews over six months would add another 7 conversion actions per month. Responding to every review would add 8 more. Combined: potentially 37 additional monthly calls and clicks from a business that is otherwise identical in product, price, and location. That is the economic value of the review economy for a North Atlanta business.

Conversion Lift from Review Actions — SOCi Analysis of Local Business Profiles



Behavior Index 2024. All figures represent median lift across analyzed local business profiles.
Conversion = GBP actions (calls, direction requests, website clicks). Source: SOCi Consumer

Conversion lift data: SOCi Consumer Behavior Index 2024. Conversion = GBP actions (calls, direction requests, website clicks). +44% per star increase; +2.8% per 10 new reviews; +4.1% per 25% response rate increase; +16.4% from responding to 100% of reviews. These are median figures across analyzed GBP profiles; individual results vary.

Finding 6

Review Velocity by Industry: How Many New Reviews You Need Every Month to Stay Competitive

8-12/month: home services; 15-30/month: restaurants; 3-6/month: legal

The shift from review volume to review velocity as the dominant review ranking signal has practical consequences for how North Atlanta businesses should approach review generation. The businesses winning in the Gwinnett and Forsyth County Map Pack in 2026 are those generating consistent monthly review flows — not those that ran a one-time review push two years ago. Spokk's 2025 analysis found that businesses generating 8-12 reviews per month consistently outrank competitors with larger but stale totals. Industry-specific monthly targets: restaurants and retail (15-30 per month) benefit from high transaction volume and should be using automated post-visit SMS systems. Healthcare and dental practices (8-15 per month) should deploy automated post-appointment review requests within 24 hours of each visit. Home services businesses including HVAC, roofing, plumbing, and pest control (6-12 per month) should send review requests via text immediately after job completion — the window of maximum customer satisfaction. Auto repair shops (5-10 per month) benefit from same-day requests while the customer is still in the service experience. Professional services including legal and financial (3-6 per month) have lower transaction volume but higher per-review impact — one review from a satisfied legal client carries significant weight in a category where most competitors have under 40 reviews.

Monthly Review Velocity Targets — What It Takes to Stay Competitive in 2026

Restaurants & Retail 15-30 per month High transaction volume	Healthcare & Dental 8-15 per month Post-visit automation	Home Services (HVAC, Roofing) 6-12 per month Post-job text/email	Auto Repair & Automotive 5-10 per month Same-day request	Professional Services (Legal) 3-6 per month Lower volume; high impact
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8-12 reviews/month consistently outrank those with larger but stale review totals (Spokk 2025).
Velocity targets from Feedback Guru 2026 and Spokk 2025 analysis. Businesses generating

Monthly velocity targets from Feedback Guru 2026 Google Review Benchmarks, Spokk 2025 analysis, and ReviewGen 2026 industry data. Velocity targets represent thresholds for maintaining competitive Map Pack positioning in active North Atlanta markets. Lower-competition markets may require fewer monthly reviews. Consistency matters more than burst: a steady 6 reviews/month outperforms 72 in January and 0 for the rest of the year.

THE DATA: NORTH ATLANTA REVIEW ECONOMY REFERENCE 2026

Data Point	Figure	Source
Consumers who read reviews before choosing a local business	87% (2026)	BrightLocal LCRS 2026
Consumers using Google to read local reviews	83% (2025, up from 81% in 2024)	BrightLocal LCRS 2025
Consumers checking 2+ review sites before purchase	74%	SurfSigma 2025 / BrightLocal
Consumers who won't use business with <20 reviews	47% (2026)	BrightLocal LCRS 2026
Consumers requiring 4.5+ stars before using a business	31% in 2026 (up from 17% in 2025)	BrightLocal LCRS 2026
Consumers for whom star rating is most important review factor	58%	BrightLocal LCRS
Consumers who trust reviews as much as personal recommendations	42% (2025, down from 79% in 2020)	BrightLocal LCRS 2025
Consumers who want reviews from last 2 weeks	32% in 2026 (up from 20% in 2025)	BrightLocal LCRS 2026
Consumers who stop below 4.0 stars entirely	57%	ReplyOnTheFly 2026 / SOCi
Review signals % of local ranking weight (Whitespark 2026)	20% (2nd-highest controllable factor)	Whitespark LSRF 2026
GBP signals % of local ranking weight (Whitespark 2026)	32% (#1 controllable factor)	Whitespark LSRF 2026
Review count as ranking factor (Search Atlas 2025)	19.2% weight overall; 26% for top-10 Map Pack	Search Atlas 2025 / 3,269 businesses
CTR lift: 5-star vs 1-star in Local Pack	~39% more clicks	BrightLocal CTR Study
CTR lift: 5-star vs 3-star in Local Pack	~25% more clicks	BrightLocal CTR Study
Map Pack Position 1 CTR	23.6% of all local search clicks	FirstPageSage 2025

Optimal star rating for conversion	4.2-4.5 stars	Northwestern Univ. Spiegel Research Center
GBP conversion lift per 1-star increase	44%	SOCi Consumer Behavior Index 2024
GBP conversion lift per 10 new reviews	2.8%	SOCi Consumer Behavior Index 2024
GBP conversion lift per 25% review response increase	4.1%	SOCi Consumer Behavior Index 2024
Conversion rate increase from 100% review response	16.4%	SOCi Consumer Behavior Index 2024
Average Google reviews for US local business	39 reviews (2025)	Maplift 2025 / 6,300+ businesses
Average reviews: HVAC / home services (competitive)	75+ to dominate Map Pack	Hook Agency 2026
Average reviews: dental (competitive metro)	55+ to stand out; 80+ to dominate	ReviewGen 2026
Average reviews: restaurants	120-300	Maplift 2025 / Trustmary
Average star rating: HVAC / home services	4.4-4.6 stars	ReplyOnTheFly 2026
Average star rating: dental / orthodontics	4.5-4.7 stars	ReplyOnTheFly 2026
Average star rating: attorneys / legal	4.3-4.5 stars	ReplyOnTheFly 2026
Average star rating: restaurants	4.0-4.2 stars	ReplyOnTheFly 2026 / Little Nudge 2026
Average star rating: automotive repair	4.0-4.2 stars	ReplyOnTheFly 2026
Keywords in reviews impact on 'near me' visibility	+40% better visibility	Maplift 2025
Monthly velocity target: home services	6-12 new reviews/month	Feedback Guru 2026
Monthly velocity target: healthcare / dental	8-15 new reviews/month	Feedback Guru 2026
Monthly velocity target: restaurants	15-30 new reviews/month	Feedback Guru 2026
Monthly velocity target: professional services	3-6 new reviews/month	Feedback Guru 2026
Positive reviews make consumers more likely to use business	85%	BrightLocal LCRS 2026
Negative reviews make consumers less likely to use business	77%	BrightLocal LCRS 2026

Red rows: CTR impact data. Green rows: SOCi conversion lift data. Blue rows: ranking weight data. BrightLocal LCRS = Local Consumer Review Survey (annual). Whitespark LSRF = Local Search Ranking Factors Survey (annual, N=47 expert SEOs). All figures are national data applied to North Atlanta market context.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR NORTH ATLANTA BUSINESSES

1 Google reviews are not optional — they are the primary trust signal for every new customer your business will ever acquire.

87% of North Atlanta consumers read reviews before choosing a local business. 83% use Google specifically. A business without a strong Google review profile is invisible in the decision process for the majority of its potential customers, regardless of how good the actual product or service is. This is not a marketing preference — it is the documented behavior of the customers you are trying to reach.

2 47% of consumers won't use a business with fewer than 20 reviews — that threshold has to be crossed first.

Getting from 0 to 20 reviews is the single most impactful goal for any North Atlanta business with a minimal review profile. Below 20, nearly half of potential customers filter you out before they read a word of your content or see your pricing. Above 20, you become visible to the full consumer population. Above 50, you become competitive. Above the industry benchmark, you begin to dominate.

3 Review velocity — not total count — is the ranking factor that most businesses are getting wrong.

The 2026 Whitespark data and Darren Shaw's explicit ranking of Review Recency in his personal top 5 signals a clear shift: Google weights fresh reviews more than it used to. A Forsyth County dental practice with 120 reviews from 2021 is being outranked by a competitor with 55 reviews that received 10 last month. The fix is a systematic review request process — text or email sent within 24 hours of every service interaction.

4 Responding to every review — including negative ones — is worth a 16.4% conversion lift.

SOCi's analysis found that responding to 100% of reviews improves GBP conversion rates by 16.4% versus businesses that don't respond. For a Gwinnett County business getting 50 contact actions per month from their GBP, that's 8 additional calls or clicks per month — from zero additional marketing spend. Review response is one of the highest-ROI local marketing activities available and one of the most consistently neglected by small businesses.

About Make It Loud Digital Marketing

Make It Loud helps North Atlanta businesses build, manage, and leverage their online reputation as a core component of local SEO strategy. We set up automated review request systems, optimize Google Business Profiles, train teams on review response best practices, and monitor review velocity against industry benchmarks. If you want to know where your review profile stands relative to your top three local competitors — in your specific category, in your specific market — we offer a free competitive review audit that answers exactly that question.

Serving Gwinnett, Forsyth, Hall, Cherokee, and North Atlanta

makeitloud.net | Free Review Audit | SEO, Reputation, Web Design

METHODOLOGY & SOURCES

All consumer behavior data from BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2024, 2025, and 2026 editions (annual publication). Ranking factor weights from Whitespark 2026 Local Search Ranking Factors survey (N=47 expert local SEO practitioners, 187 individual factors scored). CTR data from BrightLocal Local Pack Click-Through Rate Study (tested across plumbers, florists, realtors). Conversion lift data (44% per star, 2.8% per 10 reviews, 4.1% per 25% response rate, 16.4% from 100% response) from SOCi Consumer Behavior Index 2024. Industry review count benchmarks from Maplift 2025 (6,300+ businesses), ReviewGen 2026, Hook Agency 2026, Spokk 2025, and Feedback Guru 2026. Star rating benchmarks from ReplyOnTheFly 2026, Little Nudge 2026 (citing BrightLocal, SOCi, and Podium industry research). Search Atlas ranking weight data from 2025 study of 3,269 businesses. This report applies national data to the North Atlanta market context. Individual business results vary based on category, specific competitive set, geographic density of competitors, and campaign execution quality.

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