

# Review Trust Governance Playbook

A governance playbook for small businesses that want a stronger review system, cleaner response standards, and more durable public trust across Google, directories, and first-party proof surfaces.

Founders, operators, office managers, marketers, and reputation leads

## GUIDE

A governance playbook for small businesses that want a stronger review system, cleaner response standards, and more durable public trust across Google, directories, and first-party proof surfaces.

## WHAT THIS ASSET COVERS

- A review-system architecture for collection, moderation, routing, and escalation
- Channel-specific response lanes that keep public replies useful without sounding robotic
- A governance cadence for monitoring drift, false positives, and quality regressions over time

## USE THIS WHEN

1. Review generation is happening, but nobody can explain the system behind it
2. You need public trust to feel maintained rather than sporadic
3. The team wants better response quality without inventing new rules every week

## WORKING ASSET

Use this playbook when the business wants reviews to function like a governed trust system instead of a scattered marketing task.

## REVIEW SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

Build the review system around four operating layers:

- collection triggers tied to real customer milestones
- routing rules by channel, sentiment, and issue severity

- response ownership by role, not by vague team consensus
- evidence storage so lessons from reviews improve service and public trust over time

If one layer is missing, the whole reputation system becomes fragile.

## **MODERATION AND RESPONSE LANES**

Define at least three lanes:

- appreciation lane for positive reviews that deserve fast, human, confidence-building replies
- service-recovery lane for mixed reviews that need acknowledgment, context, and a next step
- escalation lane for legal, safety, billing, or identity-sensitive issues that should never be improvised publicly

Each lane should have response time expectations, approval rules, and brand-tone guidance.

## **ESCALATION RULES**

Escalate immediately when:

- the review mentions discrimination, injury, fraud, or safety risk
- the facts are unclear and public back-and-forth would deepen the problem
- account details or private customer information may be exposed
- the review is likely part of a broader operational failure instead of a one-off event

Escalation should route to one accountable owner with authority to coordinate operations, not just marketing.

## **REVIEW QUALITY STANDARDS**

Public responses should:

- acknowledge the real experience without sounding canned
- avoid defensiveness and over-explaining
- offer a clear next step when repair is appropriate
- reflect facts the business can support if challenged later

Quality is not just speed. Quality is whether the response makes the business look composed, attentive, and trustworthy.

## **GOVERNANCE CADENCE**

Weekly:

- review new review volume by channel
- inspect mixed and negative review patterns
- spot-response quality drift

Monthly:

- audit response-lane compliance
- review unresolved escalation items
- compare review themes against operational fixes, not just star averages

Quarterly:

- retire weak templates
- tighten approval rules
- update trust-language examples based on real customer language

## **FAILURE MODES**

- chasing volume without governing response quality
- letting multiple people answer publicly with different standards
- treating negative reviews as edge cases instead of operational intelligence
- using templated language so heavily that the business looks performative instead of attentive

## **DEPLOYMENT NOTES**

### **HOW STRONG TEAMS ACTUALLY USE THIS ASSET**

- Assign one accountable owner instead of letting "Review Trust Governance Playbook" become shared but unmanaged work.
- Use it with founders, operators, office managers, marketers, and reputation leads in a weekly rhythm so the asset drives decisions rather than sitting in a folder.
- Decide in advance what counts as green, watch, and red performance so the team knows when to escalate.
- Capture learnings directly in the document every week so the asset becomes smarter over time instead of resetting to zero.

## **BEST DEPLOYMENT SEQUENCE**

- Review generation is happening, but nobody can explain the system behind it

- You need public trust to feel maintained rather than sporadic
- The team wants better response quality without inventing new rules every week

## **WHAT SEPARATES A SERIOUS VERSION FROM A BASIC TEMPLATE**

- Clear ownership for every step, not generic advice without accountability.
- Targets, thresholds, or decision rules that tell the team what good looks like.
- Specific working components: A review-system architecture for collection, moderation, routing, and escalation, Channel-specific response lanes that keep public replies useful without sounding robotic, A governance cadence for monitoring drift, false positives, and quality regressions over time.
- A built-in review cadence so the document becomes part of operations rather than a one-time download.