

Negative Review Decision Tree

Reply publicly, take it offline, or report it — worked out before you're stood in front of one.

Most of the anxiety around a bad review comes from not having a plan. Work through these four questions in order — the first one that applies tells you what to do.

Step 1 — Does this look like a genuine customer, or fake/spam?

If it looks fake, spam, or you have no record of this person

Don't engage publicly yet. Gather evidence and report it to the platform — see the Fake Review Flagging Guide download for the exact steps per platform.

If it's clearly a genuine customer

Continue to Step 2.

Step 2 — Does it break the platform's actual rules (profanity, personal attacks, threats)?

If yes

Report it to the platform for a policy violation AND reply publicly with a short, calm note — the two aren't mutually exclusive, and a reply shows other readers you're paying attention while the report is reviewed.

If no

Continue to Step 3.

Step 3 — Does it involve sensitive specifics (a deposit dispute, a financial or legal matter)?

If yes

Reply publicly with a brief, calm acknowledgment only — never discuss financial or legal specifics in public. Invite them to call you directly, then take the entire conversation offline from there.

If no

Continue to Step 4.

Step 4 — Can you genuinely resolve or clarify this in a short public reply?

If yes

Reply publicly: acknowledge what they raised, briefly clarify or correct if needed, and thank them for the feedback. Use the Review Reply Template Library for the exact wording.

If no — it needs a real conversation

Reply publicly with a short acknowledgment and a direct invitation to call — then make sure someone actually follows up.

Whatever the outcome: reply within a few hours where you can, never argue in public, and never delete or hide a genuine review, even a fair one — it's usually more damaging to your credibility than the review itself.