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Hi, my name is Siobhan and I am the co-founder of Lily's Florist.

Attracting a horror 1-star review saying your flowers were dead on arrival, when the customer never bothered to pick up the phone, send you an SMS, or send an email first? Yeah, that stings, and has the potential to cause your flower shop a bit of stress and reputational damage. After 17 years operating Lily's Florist, then my own florist and gift shop before that, and dealing with hundreds of partner florists across Australia, I've seen this scenario play out more times than I can count. It's frustrating beyond belief at times, it feels unfair and unjust even, and honestly, your first instinct might be to bite back with something along the lines of "Why didn't you just call us?"

And that instinct is the expensive one. The bit that feels like your whole case, that they never rang, never sent so much as a text, never gave you the chance, counts for nothing. Not on Google, not on ProductReview, nowhere. No platform in this country asks a customer to contact a business before they review it, which means the sentence you most want to type this morning is the one that will cost you the most.

That review, unfortunately, has stopped being a private disagreement between you and one unhappy customer. It is now a public conversation that every potential customer is watching. How you handle it can either tank your reputation or actually boost it. Wild, right?

Most of the review advice you will find online is American, or out of date, or would quietly land you in more trouble than the review ever could, which is what sent me back to rewrite this. So this version has the actual Australian law in it, the platform rules, the odds on each move you can make, and the numbers off our own listing, which are not all flattering.

IF YOU ONLY HAVE 30 SECONDS

- 1 A review claiming your flowers arrived dead is almost never removable, even with a timestamped bench photo, because the platforms treat it as a factual dispute and refuse to referee those.
- 2 No review platform anywhere requires a customer to contact you first. The fact they never rang has no bearing on removal, and pointing it out in public makes you look worse, not better.
- 3 The biggest legal risk attached to your listing is not the bad review. It is how you collect the good ones. Meriton paid \$3 million for filtering who got asked.
- 4 Most florist companies cannot sue for defamation at all. Ten or more employees and you are generally excluded, and the clock runs out one year from publication.
- 5 Your public reply is written for future customers, not the reviewer, and the fastest way to lose them is naming the recipient, the ward, or the funeral.
- 6 Fifty genuine reviews will do more for you than any dispute you ever win. One 1-star review drops a 4.8 profile to 4.45 at ten reviews, and to 4.78 at two hundred and fifty.

I should say something about the length before you scroll. This started out as a blog post and it is now, I don't know, whatever this has turned into. I did try to cut it. Every time I took something out it turned out to be the bit a florist would actually need at two in the morning, so back in it went. So do not read the whole thing. Have a look at the contents, take the section that matches whatever has just happened to you, and come back when the next thing goes wrong. It will.

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The First 24 Hours: Don't Touch That Keyboard Yet

Take a Breather (Seriously)

I learned this one the hard way back in our Kingscliff shop days. That immediate urge to defend yourself, to explain what really happened, to point out they never gave you a chance to fix it? Natural, but dangerous. My best advice is to give yourself at least two hours before you even think about typing a response, but more on that below. Go make yourself a coffee, take a walk down the street if you're lucky enough to be near the beach, whatever it takes to let that initial anger subside and take the sting out of the way you feel.

A defensive response written in the heat of the moment does way more damage than the original review ever could. I've watched florists absolutely torch their own reputations by getting into public arguments with reviewers. Not pretty I have to say.

You are somewhere on this line right now

Nothing about the review changes over the next 48 hours. Only you do. The whole trick is replying from the third column instead of the first.

Hour 0

DO NOT TYPE

You have read it four times. You already know they never rang.

Every sentence available to you right now is a defence. Defences read as guilt to a stranger. Walk out the back.

Hours 2 to 24

GO QUIET AND DIG

You want to prove them wrong. Do it privately, where it costs nothing.

POS, delivery log, the docket, the pre-delivery photo, the temperature that afternoon. Screenshot the review before it gets edited.

Hours 24 to 48

REPLY, THEN RING

The heat has gone. You can write to the room instead of to them.

Public reply first, calm and signed. Then pick up the phone yourself rather than waiting to be rung.

Day 3 on

READS AS SILENCE

The anger has passed. So has the window.

From here the listing shows a complaint nobody answered, to every person who checks you out for the next several years.

One exception to the 24-hour rule. If the review accuses you of something criminal, or the reviewer has demanded money, get advice before you post anything at all. A public reply can cut across a legal position you have not taken yet.

Do Your Detective Work

Before you do anything public, you want that order sitting in front of you. Pull up your POS system. Delivery logs, online orders, the phone messages, the lot. Find the order if it exists, and gather everything around it:

- Order date and time
- What they ordered versus what was delivered
- Delivery details and any special instructions
- Weather conditions that day (36-degree heat in Brisbane can wreak havoc on flowers in transit)
- Any photos you took before delivery
- A full screenshot of the review, the reviewer's profile, and your rating as it stands right now, before anything gets edited

This investigation isn't about building a case to prove them wrong publicly. It's about understanding what might have gone wrong so you can genuinely address it.

No Match in the System Does Not Mean No Customer

Here is the trap, and I have fallen into it myself. You search the name, nothing comes up, and your whole body relaxes because now you have a story: this is fake, this is a competitor, this is someone with the wrong shop. Then you go and say that in public and it turns out the woman was the recipient, not the buyer, and her son ordered it under his own name from three states away.

Flowers are the one product where the person who pays and the person who receives are almost never the same human. Which means an empty search result proves a lot less than it feels like it proves. The reviewer might be:

The recipient, not the purchaser

She got the flowers. Her name is on nothing. She is the one who saw them arrive and she is the one writing the review.

A family member arranging a funeral

Sympathy orders get placed by whoever is coping best that week. The review often comes from someone else in the family entirely.

The office administrator

Ordered on the company card, under the company name, for a boss who has never heard of you.

Someone using a different name

A nickname, a maiden name, a shortened first name, a partner's account. Google display names are whatever the account holder felt like typing.

A phone-only customer

If your phone orders live in a book rather than the POS, they will never turn up in a database search.

A marketplace or relay order

They bought through somebody else's website and the order landed on your bench. As far as they know, you are the whole business.

The last one is ours, and I am not going to pretend otherwise. We are a relay network. A customer in Perth orders through our site, the order goes to a partner florist in or close to the delivery suburb, and if something goes wrong that florist may cop a review from a person they have no record of, because the record is sitting in our system instead of theirs. I have had that phone call from a partner more than once and there is no comfortable version of it.

So the finding is still worth having. "We searched purchaser and recipient records, by name, phone, postcode, delivery date and every spelling variant we could think of, and found nothing" is strong evidence when you put it in a removal request. It is just not a conclusion on its own. The better question, and the one the platforms ask, is whether the review describes a plausible customer experience and whether it breaks a rule that exists independently of your disagreement with it.

Quick Check: Is This Review Even Allowed?

Look, most negative reviews are going to stay put, but occasionally you'll get one that actually violates platform policies. Google's content rules run a lot wider than most florists realise, and they are worth reading properly once rather than guessing at during a bad week.

Clear grounds for a report on Google include content that isn't based on a real experience, paid or incentivised reviews, someone posting from multiple accounts, a competitor trying to knock you down, a current or former employee with a grievance, personal information, impersonation, off-topic content, advertising, and harassment or hate speech. Yelp adds copied content and reviews aimed at the wrong business. Most of the Australian platforms carry some version of the same list.

But here's the reality check: a customer claiming flowers were dead? It is their experience, even if you have photos showing otherwise. The platforms treat that as a factual dispute between a business and a customer, and they do not play referee in those situations. Your evidence is not evidence to them. It is one side of an argument.

You are looking for the button that makes it go away

Pick what the review did. Five of these six are worth a report. The sixth is almost certainly the one you got.

"The flowers arrived dead"

IT ALMOST CERTAINLY STAYS UP

You have the photo. You took it at 9:40am on the bench, before it went in the van, and the arrangement in that photo is not dead. It does not matter.

The platforms treat this as a factual dispute and decline to adjudicate. One partial exception worth knowing: ProductReview.com.au will sometimes temporarily disable a review while it asks the reviewer to verify the purchase, and reinstate it if they do. Everywhere else, expect it to stand.

Which means the morning you were about to spend on a removal request is better spent on the reply, because the reply is the only lever you have.

Profanity or hate speech

WORTH REPORTING

A clear breach of the content rules on every major platform, and one of the few cases where they will act without you having to prove anything about the order.

Report it, then leave it alone. Replying to an abusive review while the report is open puts your words next to theirs permanently, even if theirs comes down.

Posted by a competitor

WORTH REPORTING

A conflict of interest, and against the rules on Google, Yelp and most of the Australian directories. This is the one where the detective work pays off directly.

Your case is the affiliation plus the absence of a record: their public business or employment page, no order in the POS, nothing in the online orders for that name, that address, or that week. Submit that, not your suspicion.

Ex-employee grievance

WORTH REPORTING

Google's conflict-of-interest rules cover current and former employees. A review about rosters, management or a dismissal is not a customer experience, and it is reportable on those grounds.

Keep the submission factual. Employment dates and the review content are the case. Do not editorialise about the person, and do not contact them about it.

Names the recipient's address

REPORT IT URGENTLY

Personal information is prohibited across every platform and this is the one category where florists get hit hardest, because our reviews carry addresses, hospital wards, funeral details and card messages.

Report it as a privacy violation rather than as a false review. And do not quote any of it back in your public reply, which is the mistake almost everyone makes while trying to correct the record.

Wrong business entirely

WORTH REPORTING

A rant about a different business, a review that landed on the wrong listing, or a complaint about a courier or a marketplace seller you have never dealt with. It happens more than people expect, particularly to shops with a common trading name.

Usually straightforward to remove. Check the reviewer's other reviews before you file, it often shows exactly which shop they meant.

Reporting genuine criticism over and over does not just fail. It builds a record with the platform of a business trying to suppress feedback, and it makes the reports that do matter harder to win.

02

Crafting Your Public Response: This Is Your Stage

The Response That Turns Heads (In a Good Way)

Your public reply needs to hit several marks, and it's not really for the angry reviewer. It's for everyone else reading. Here's the framework that works:

Respond within 24-48 hours.

Any longer and you look like you don't care. Any quicker and you might still be too emotional.

Make it personal.

Use their name. It shows you're not copying and pasting some generic response.

Thank them first.

I know, I know. Thanking someone who just trashed your business feels wrong. But starting with "Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback" immediately sets a professional tone that makes you look like the reasonable one.

Apologise for their experience.

Not for what you did or didn't do, but for how they feel. There's a difference. "We're so sorry to hear your experience didn't match your expectations" works perfectly.

Take it offline.

This is crucial. Never, ever try to resolve the specifics in public view. Provide a direct email and phone number, and invite them to reach out privately.

Sign it personally.

End with your actual name and title. It shows a real person is taking responsibility.

Say nothing that belongs to the customer.

The one rule that is specific to us, and the one I see broken most. Everything you know about that order belongs to two people who did not write the review. More below, because this is the part that can genuinely hurt someone.

The Bit Where Florists Get Into Real Trouble

Most industries can argue about a bad review in public and the worst outcome is that they look petty. We cannot, because our order records are other people's private lives. The delivery address. The ward number. The name of the funeral home. What the card said, and who it was from, and what the relationship was.

I have watched a florist reply to a complaint about a late sympathy delivery by explaining, publicly, and completely reasonably from their point of view, which chapel the flowers went to and what time the service started. The review was about them. The reply was about a grieving family who had not asked to be in the conversation at all.

So there is a hard line in a public reply, and it does not move: you can confirm that you want to investigate, and you can give a private channel. Then you stop. Everything else waits for the phone.

What can and cannot go in a public reply

Every item on the left belongs to the sender or the recipient, and neither of them chose to be part of this. Most of it is also a platform violation if you post it.

NEVER, EVEN TO DEFEND YOURSELF

- ✗ The recipient's name or address
- ✗ Any phone number or email from the order
- ✗ The hospital, ward, aged care home or funeral home
- ✗ What the card message said
- ✗ Who the sender is, or their relationship to the recipient
- ✗ The occasion, if it was a death, an illness or a breakup
- ✗ Payment details or what they paid
- ✗ Anything from your internal fraud or chargeback checks
- ✗ Screenshots of private emails, texts or chat

SAFE, AND ENOUGH

- ✓ That you are sorry the experience fell short
- ✓ That you want to look at it properly
- ✓ A direct phone number and email
- ✓ Your name and your role
- ✓ A neutral, non-identifying detail if it is genuinely needed
- ✓ Your published substitution or delivery policy, in one line
- ✓ An invitation to contact you with the order number

The test before you hit publish: if the recipient read this reply, would they learn that someone sent them flowers, or where they were when they got them? If yes, cut it.

Handling the "But They Never Called Us" Issue

This is the tricky bit. You want other customers to know you would have fixed it if given the chance, but you can't sound accusatory. Here's how to thread that needle:

Instead of: "Why didn't you call us? We would have fixed it!"

Try: "We have a satisfaction guarantee and wish we'd had the opportunity to resolve this for you directly with a replacement."

See the difference? The second version informs everyone reading about your guarantee while expressing genuine regret that you couldn't help. It's marketing disguised as customer service.

And while we are here, the thing nobody tells you when you are staring at that review at seven in the morning: no platform anywhere requires a customer to contact a business before leaving a review. Not Google, not ProductReview, not one of them. Them never ringing you feels like the whole case, and it carries exactly no weight in a removal decision. Knowing that early saves you a week.

03

Taking It Private: Where the Real Work Happens

Be the One Who Reaches Out

Once you've posted your public response, don't sit around waiting for them to call. If you can identify them from your records, pick up the phone or send an email immediately. Most angry reviewers don't expect this level of service, and it can completely change the dynamic.

I've seen situations where a furious customer becomes a loyal advocate just because the owner personally called them. It's powerful stuff.

One caveat, and it matters. Contact them once. If they do not answer or do not want to engage, that is the end of it. A second and third message, however polite, stops looking like customer service and starts looking like pressure, and a reviewer who screenshots four unanswered messages from you has a much better story than the one they originally posted.

What to Say When You Connect

Keep it simple and solution focused:

THE OPENING LINE

"Hi [Name], this is [Your Name] from [Shop Name]. I saw your review and wanted to personally apologise again for your disappointing experience. I'd really like to make this right for you. Would you prefer a replacement arrangement or a full refund?"

Notice how you're not debating what happened? You're moving straight to resolution. Save everyone the headache.

Offering them the choice between refund and replacement does more than sound generous. Where the flowers genuinely failed, that choice is the customer's to make under consumer law rather than yours, which we get into properly further down. Leading with it puts you on the right side of the law and sounds generous at the same time.

The Review Update Request

Only after you've completely resolved their issue should you gently ask about updating the review. And I mean gently:

"We're so glad we could resolve this for you. If you feel we've now provided the service you expected, we'd be incredibly grateful if you'd consider updating your review. It makes a huge difference to a small business like ours. Whatever you decide is completely up to you, and nothing about the refund depends on it."

That last sentence is not padding. Never make the resolution contingent on them changing the review. That's both unethical and likely to backfire spectacularly, and if the customer ever screenshots the exchange, the line you added is the one that saves you.

04

Were the Flowers Actually Dead? Anna on the Bench Evidence

Before any of the legal or platform stuff, there is a question worth answering honestly, and I am not the one to answer it. Anna is a qualified florist, trained in North Carolina, fifteen years on the bench. She looks at a dead-on-arrival complaint and sees a diagnostic problem rather than an insult.

ANNA, QUALIFIED FLORIST

Match the complaint to the stems and most of these answer themselves.

Chrysanths do not die in two days. Nothing you can do to a chrysanth short of leaving it in a hot car will kill it inside a week. So if someone rings you about a chrysanth-heavy bunch that was gone by Wednesday and it left your bench on Monday, believe them and go and look at your cold chain, because something in that chain got hot and the chrysanths are telling you where.

Gerberas are the opposite. They fold at the neck first, they fold fast, and in a Queensland February they will fold on a doorstep in under two hours. A gerbera complaint in summer is usually a delivery-timing story, not a quality story. Same with hydrangea, which wilts harder and faster out of water than almost anything we sell, and which most customers will never believe can be brought back by floating the whole head in the sink for half an hour. Worth telling them anyway.

Then there is the batch that is not dead at all. Tight green lily buds look like sticks to somebody who has never bought lilies before and they are meant to, that is how you buy them so they last. Tulips keep growing after they are cut and bend toward the window, and I have taken that complaint more times than I can count from people who thought their arrangement was collapsing when it was doing exactly what tulips do. Roses that drop their heads two days in are a different matter. Air block in the stem, from a dry-out somewhere in transit or a bad recut, and that one is a real failure.

The point of all this is that you can usually work out which kind of complaint you have before you decide how you feel about it. Half the reviews that read as unfair are describing a stem doing its job. The other half are describing your cold chain, and those ones are a gift, because they are the only free diagnostic you will ever get.

This is why I put Anna before the law rather than after it. If the flowers genuinely failed, most of what follows stops being relevant. You fix it, you refund it, you find out why, and the review takes care of itself.

05

Know Your Legal Ground: Australian Consumer Law

READ THIS FIRST

Everything in this section and the next is general information for florists, written from running a flower business, not legal advice. We are not lawyers. Consumer law and defamation law both turn on the specific facts, and they differ in the detail between states. If money or reputation is genuinely on the line, get advice from an Australian solicitor before you act on anything here.

What You're Actually Required to Do

Under Australian Consumer Law, flowers that are genuinely dead on arrival will usually amount to what the law calls a "major failure." Where that applies, the customer gets to choose between a refund or a replacement. You don't get to insist on one over the other.

Now, many florists have policies requiring customers to report issues within 24-48 hours with photos. These policies are good business practice, but here's the kicker: they don't override ACL rights. If the flowers really were dead, the customer's entitled to a remedy even if they didn't follow your reporting procedure perfectly.

Which one wins when they disagree

You wrote the left-hand column yourself, and it is worth having. It is just not the column that decides the outcome.

YOUR SHOP POLICY

Tell us within 24 to 48 hours, with a photo

- Sets the expectation before anyone orders
- Filters the chancers from the genuine
- Gives whoever answers the phone a script
- Does not override a single line on the right

AUSTRALIAN CONSUMER LAW

A major failure hands the choice to the customer

- The customer picks the remedy, not you
- Refund or replacement, their choice
- Still applies if they missed your window
- Still applies if they never sent a photo

If the flowers really were dead, **the right-hand column wins**, and the review is the least of it. A replacement costs you one arrangement. A Fair Trading complaint costs you a fortnight.

Your Store Policies vs. The Law

Your satisfaction guarantee and reporting requirements are still valuable. They help manage customer expectations and filter out dubious claims. But when push comes to shove, ACL wins. The smart move? Honour the spirit of consumer law regardless. It builds tremendous goodwill and keeps you out of disputes with Fair Trading.

The Part That Gets Florists Fined

Here is the reframe that took me embarrassingly long to arrive at. Nobody in this country has ever been fined over a review a customer left them. Florists and businesses like ours get fined over the reviews they collected, displayed, filtered or wrote themselves.

The Australian enforcement record on this is short, specific, and worth knowing by heart, because every one of these started with a business that thought it was just tidying up its reputation.

Nobody was fined for the review they received

Three Australian outcomes, none of them a florist, and every one about reviews the business collected, edited, withheld or wrote rather than one it received.

\$3m

MERITON, 2018

Filtering who gets asked

Masked the email addresses of guests it expected would leave negative feedback, so TripAdvisor's invitations never reached them. Every review it did collect was genuine. The selection was the breach.

\$2.9m

HEALTHENGINE,
2020

Withholding and editing

Did not publish a large volume of negative reviews, and edited negative passages out of others. Penalties covered that conduct along with a separate patient-referral matter.

\$6,600

CITYMOVE

Testimonials that were made up

Paid an infringement notice after testimonials on its own website were found to be fabricated. Small money, and the cheapest lesson on this list.

Penalty maximums changed on 28 March 2026 and are now far higher than the regime most of these were decided under. Do not use old figures in a compliance policy without checking which period applies.

Look at that list again and notice what is missing. Not one of them is a business that failed to get a bad review taken down. The exposure runs the other way, every time.

06

Can You Actually Sue? Almost Certainly Not

This is the one that surprises people, and I include myself. The assumption almost every shop owner starts with is that a review which is flat out false is something you can sue over, and that the only real question is whether it is worth the money. The first part of that assumption is usually wrong before you get anywhere near the second.

Australian defamation law does not let most companies sue at all. Not most florists, not most small businesses. The rule is that a corporation is generally excluded unless it is a non-profit, or it has fewer than ten employees and is not connected to another company. Which knocks out a great many florists on the employee count alone, and knocks out plenty more because of how their group is structured.

Sole traders are in a different position, and so is an owner personally named in a review, because a review that identifies and attacks a person rather than a trading entity is a different case. But "the review is false" has never been the test on its own.

Before you ring a solicitor, answer this

Australian defamation law shuts most companies out before the question of whether the review is true ever comes up.

Company, 10 or more staff

GENERALLY CANNOT SUE

Ten or more employees puts a company outside the excluded-corporation exception, so the defamation door is generally shut regardless of how false the review is.

What is left is a different set of doors: misleading or deceptive conduct where a competitor is involved, injurious falsehood, breach of contract, or intellectual property if your images have been taken. Each has its own requirements and none of them accept "it is false" as the case.

Company, under 10 staff

POSSIBLY, ON THE COMPANY TEST

Fewer than ten employees, not an associated entity of another corporation, and not a public body. On the corporate test you are through the first gate.

The next gate is serious harm, and for a corporation that means serious financial loss you can evidence. Cancelled orders, a lost wedding, a corporate account that walked. A drop in mood is not it.

Part of a bigger group

GENERALLY CANNOT SUE

Being an associated entity of another corporation takes you out of the exception even if the head count is low. Group structures catch a lot of florists here, and it is usually a surprise.

Worth checking with your accountant before you spend anything on legal advice, because the structure question is answered in an afternoon and it decides everything after it.

Sole trader, or I was named

THE STRONGEST POSITION ON THIS LIST

An individual can sue in their own name where the material identifies and defames them personally. A review naming you, or a shop small enough that naming the shop names you, can clear the identification hurdle.

You still have to show serious harm to reputation, and the reviewer still has defences available including substantial truth and honest opinion. Calling something an opinion does not automatically protect it, and criticism of price or quality is often treated as opinion anyway.

One year. The limitation period generally runs twelve months from first publication, not from when you noticed. Extensions exist and they are limited.

Twenty-eight days. Before proceedings you generally have to serve a compliant concerns notice setting out the imputations and the serious harm, then wait at least 28 days.

Anonymous is not untouchable. In *Kabbabe v Google LLC* a dentist obtained procedural steps aimed at identifying an anonymous reviewer. It is possible. It is a court process with court costs, and identifying someone is not the same as winning against them.

None of which means you have no options. It means the option is almost never the courtroom, and every hour you spend imagining the courtroom is an hour not spent on the two things that move the numbers, which are the reply and the next fifty reviews.

07

Which Platform You're On Changes Everything

Most of the review advice you will find online is written for American businesses, which is why it talks endlessly about Yelp and never mentions ProductReview.com.au. In this country that is backwards. Yelp barely registers for most Australian florists, and it has a rule that catches people out: Yelp does not allow businesses to ask customers for reviews at all. If you are running a post-delivery review request campaign, Yelp needs to be left out of it.

Below is the map, and where a dispute is worth your afternoon.

Where an Australian florist dispute goes

Removal odds assume you can demonstrate the policy breach. They are planning ranges from the way these processes run, not published platform statistics.

Google Business Profile

The one that matters most

Fake engagement, conflict of interest, rating manipulation, off-topic, harassment, personal information, impersonation. Report beside the review, track it in the Reviews Management Tool, and there is a one-time appeal where the decision is eligible.

HIGH on breach
LOW on dispute

ProductReview.com.au

The big Australian one

Not a genuine consumer experience, guideline breach, commercial conflict. Report through the review menu. Uniquely, it may temporarily disable a review while it asks the reviewer to verify, and reinstate it if they do.

MEDIUM
to HIGH

Feefo

Purchaser-verified

Invitations come from your own transaction feed, so a review tied to a real order is not coming down over interpretation. Moderation is limited to authenticity, abuse, discriminatory language and competitor references. Wrong-profile mapping is fixable.

MEDIUM
on authenticity

Facebook and Meta

Community Standards

Assessed against Community Standards rather than a review-specific code: fraud, spam, impersonation, harassment, hate, privacy. Report through Meta Business Suite. Turning Recommendations off removes the whole feature, not one item.

MEDIUM
on Standards

Trustpilot

Flag, do not carpet-bomb

Flag for harmful or illegal content, personal information, advertising, not a genuine experience, or wrong business. Reviewers may be asked for documentation within a short window. Flagging every negative review is the fastest way to lose credibility there.

MEDIUM

Yelp

Do not solicit here

Conflict of interest, no first-hand experience, wrong business, plagiarism, threats, privacy, promotional content. The catch is upstream: Yelp prohibits businesses asking for reviews, and prohibits incentives. Leave it out of any campaign.

**MEDIUM
to HIGH**

Yellow Pages, True Local, Localsearch

Directory layer

Moderated directories with report functions for false, offensive or irrelevant content. Check both Yellow Pages and True Local, since content syndicates between them. Localsearch leans on private contact with the reviewer and a professional public reply.

**LOW to
MEDIUM**

Oneflare

Closed

The platform shut down on 30 June 2026. Treat anything there as legacy. Worth checking whether old reviews or profile copies are still indexed anywhere, because they can outlive the site they came from.

**NOT
APPLICABLE**

Whichever platform it is, one concise evidence-based report beats five emotional ones. Name the exact policy you say has been breached, describe the searches you ran, and attach the screenshots. Vague outrage gets a form response.

The pattern across all of them is the same, and it is worth internalising because it saves you a lot of wasted evenings. Platforms remove content that breaks a rule. They do not remove content that is unfair, and they do not decide who is telling the truth about a bunch of flowers.

08

Building Your Reputation Fortress

The Photo Evidence System

Start photographing every single arrangement before it goes out for delivery. Email it to the customer with a message like "Your beautiful arrangement is on its way! Here's how it looked leaving our shop."

This does three things:

- 01 Sets clear expectations about what they're getting
- 02 Creates timestamped evidence of quality
- 03 Actually delights customers who love seeing what they've sent

We've been doing this at Lily's Florist through our partner network for years, and it's prevented countless disputes. Just be clear-eyed about what it is worth. It settles arguments with customers privately and it tells you honestly whether your own bench got it right, which is worth the phone storage on its own. It will not get a review taken down, because the platform is not weighing your photo against their memory.

Make Your Policies Crystal Clear

Put your satisfaction guarantee front and centre on your website. Be specific about your process: "Not completely satisfied? Contact us within 48 hours with a photo and we'll make it right."

Include detailed product descriptions mentioning substitution policies and seasonal availability. Include care instructions with every delivery. The more transparent you are upfront, the fewer nasty surprises later.

Build Your Review Army

The best defence against one bad review? Fifty good ones surrounding it. Set up an automated system to request reviews from customers a few days after delivery, and send it to everyone. I mean everyone. The ones who rang up cranky, the ones you refunded, the one whose delivery went to the wrong street. Same message, same timing, no filtering.

This is the bit where I have to be really direct with you, because the instinct runs the other way and the instinct is expensive. Picking out your happy customers to ask, or having the counter staff only hand the review card to the ones who are smiling, is called review gating, and it is the thing Meriton paid \$3 million for. Google prohibits selectively soliciting positive reviews and prohibits discouraging negative ones. It does not matter that every review you end up with is genuine. Meriton's were genuine too. The selection was the breach.

A review request that will not get you into trouble. Send it to every completed delivery in a defined group. Use the same wording every time. Say something like: "Reviews help other customers know what to expect and help our team improve. You are welcome to share your honest experience here. There is no obligation, and all feedback, positive or negative, is valued." No discount, no free delivery, no entry into a draw, no asking for five stars, and no asking them to mention a particular staff member or product. Keep a record of which group you sent it to and what the message said.

Three more things worth knowing. Google prohibits incentives outright, so a discount for a review is off the table there even where an equally offered and clearly disclosed incentive might pass muster under consumer law generally. Yelp bans asking altogether, so leave it out. And if a system-wide problem hits, say your cool room fails on a Friday in February, you can absolutely pause the whole campaign for everyone affected. What you cannot do is keep it running and quietly remove the people who complained.

A single 1-star review in a sea of 5-star reviews looks like an outlier. A single 1-star review when you only have three reviews total? That's a disaster.

The review does not change. The line under it does.

Same shop, same 1-star review, same wording, same day. The only difference between these two listings is how many reviews were already sitting there when it landed.

IF IT LANDS TODAY

Your Flower Shop

Florist · Open until 5:00 pm

★★★★★ 3.9 4 reviews

The bad review is the shop. It is a quarter of everything anyone can see about you.

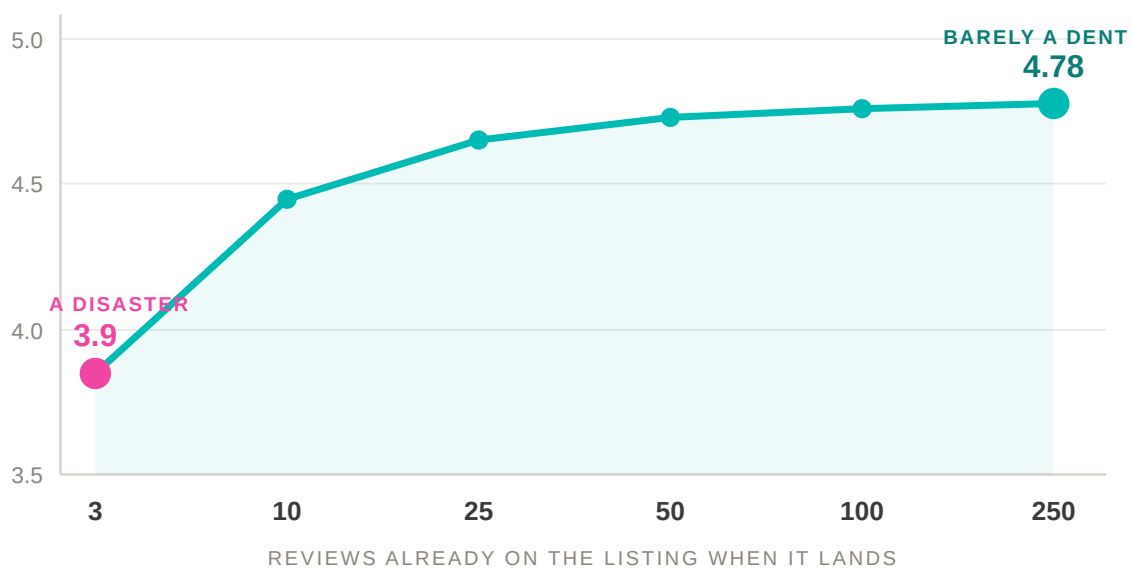
IF IT LANDS AFTER A YEAR OF ASKING

Your Flower Shop

Florist · Open until 5:00 pm

★★★★★ 4.8 251 reviews

The bad review is a story about one bad day, sitting under a calm reply from the owner.



Working: a profile averaging 4.8, then one 1-star review added. Straight arithmetic, not a prediction about rankings. You cannot delete the numerator. You can start work on the denominator this afternoon, as long as you ask everybody.

09

From 1.1 to 4.1: What Happened When We Finally Asked

Everything above this is the argument. Here is us doing it, with the numbers, over the last ten months, on a page anyone can go and check while they are reading this.

In October 2025 our rating on ProductReview was 1.1 out of 5.

I am not going to dress that up. One point one. You cannot really do much worse than that without trying, and I remember sitting with it open on the laptop at the kitchen table thinking well, there it is, that is what the internet reckons of us after all this time.

The thing that took us far too long to see, and the reason I wanted this section in the article at all, is that the 1.1 was never measuring our flowers. It was measuring who could be bothered. Nobody who gets a lovely bunch on a Tuesday goes hunting for an independent review site. They text a photo to their sister and get on with their day. The people who find their way to a review platform unprompted, with no invitation and no reminder, are almost without exception people who are furious, and rightly so in some cases. Meanwhile our own numbers, across twenty years of running flower shops, put something like nine orders in ten going through with nobody having a single problem.

So we had a public rating built almost entirely out of the unhappiest tenth, some of it written a decade ago, and we had spent years reading it as a verdict on our work. It was a verdict on our sampling.

ANDREW THOMSON, CO-FOUNDER

First thing was claiming the listing, which sounds obvious and had somehow never been done in all those years.

Then I went and read how ProductReview actually ranks a profile, and the useful part is that it weights recent reviews more heavily than old ones. A fair bit of what was dragging us down had been written years earlier by people whose experience had nothing to do with how the business runs now. So the number was not a wall. It was a queue. Get enough new reviews into the front of it and the old ones stop deciding who we are.

The plan was one email. It goes to every single customer who orders, no exceptions, no filtering, no discount attached to it, and both our names are on the bottom. I set a goal of four stars by the end of August 2026 and Siobhan told me I was dreaming. We got there in June.

The other half of it is the replies. Every review gets one. The one-stars, the five-stars, the two-star ones that are really just somebody having a rough week. Every reply is signed Andrew and Siobhan, or Siobhan and Andrew depending on who wrote it, and that is deliberate. I call it entity stitching, which is a grand name for a simple thing. You keep putting the two human names next to the business name, in public, on every single reply, until the search engines and the customers both work out that the business has actual people inside it. It works, and here is how I know it works. Customers have started writing "thanks Andrew and Siobhan" into their reviews. The stitching is being done by other people now.

The email that did it

There is no clever bit. It goes to everyone who orders, a couple of days after delivery, and this is all it says.



Siobhan, Andrew & Team @ Lily's Florist

To: Every customer who ordered, two days after delivery

Subject: [your subject line]

Hi [First name],

Hope the flowers we sent out the other day arrived fresh and made someone smile as that's genuinely what matters most to us.

As a small Australian, family business trying to do things right, honest feedback on independent sites like **ProductReview** is incredibly important. It helps other people know what to expect and keeps us on our toes.

If you have 60 seconds to spare, would you mind sharing your thoughts on your experience? Every bit helps.

[> Leave your review here](#) [your review page link]

No worries if you're flat out, but we'd be hugely grateful if you could.

If you have any questions we're here to help! Give us a call at 1300 360-469

Siobhan, Andrew & Team @ Lily's Florist

Everyone gets it

No sorting by who seemed pleased on the phone.

Nothing attached

No discount, no free delivery, no prize draw.

Both names on it

Signed by the owners, not by the business.

Asks for honest, not good

No five-star request, no wording to include.

There is nothing clever in it. That is what makes it work, and it is also what keeps it legal.

Look at what is not in it. No discount. No free delivery next time. No entry in a draw. No asking for five stars, no asking them to mention a particular arrangement or a staff member, and no filtering of who gets sent it. The customer who rang up cranky on Thursday gets exactly the same email as the one who sent us a thank you card.

That last part is the whole game, and it is the difference between what we did and what cost Meriton three million dollars. They took people out of the invitation list. We put everybody in it. Same lever, opposite direction, and if anyone ever asked me to prove our invitations were neutral I could do it in about four minutes, because there is one email and one list and no exceptions to either.

The part that makes this a hack, not just a story

Here is the bit that matters if you are reading this with a shoebox for a marketing budget, and honestly it might be the most useful thing in this whole article.

On ProductReview, claiming your listing is free. Replying to reviews is free. The thing you actually pay for is the invitation. The automated post-purchase email asking the customer to review you is the product, and it sits behind a subscription.

Free: claim the listing, and reply publicly to every review as the business.

Paid: automated review invitations.

The entry tier caps invitations at 50 a month. Six hundred a year, and only if every single one converts, which none of them do.

The integrations are Shopify, Magento 2 and WooCommerce. On anything else, the automation is not available to you regardless of what you pay.

No tier publishes a price. Starter, Professional and Premium are all "get a quote", so finding out whether you can afford it means booking a call with a salesperson.

Fifty a month is the number that stopped me. If you send sixty arrangements out in a decent week you have burnt the entry tier by Thursday, so you are into the quote conversation whether you wanted one or not. And if your shop runs on anything other than those three platforms, the automation was never on the table.

So we did the paid part ourselves. Our email system already knew who had ordered and what day the flowers went out, which is the entire technical requirement, and the free half of the platform, the claiming and the replying, was sitting there the whole time doing nothing because nobody had logged in. One template. One send. No subscription, no cap, no sales call.

The obvious question, and the one I would have asked first, is whether a review you gathered yourself counts for less than one that arrived through their system. Ten months and a thousand-odd reviews in, I cannot see any difference. Same visibility, same weighting as far as I can tell, and the ones that come in off our own email sit on the listing exactly like the rest. If there is a penalty for doing it the free way, it has not turned up on ours.

If your system will not send it, send it yourself

Not every shop system will fire an email off the back of an order, and a few of the ones that claim to are more trouble than they are worth. It does not matter even slightly. Write the template once, and then every morning somebody sits down for ten minutes and sends it out by hand to the customers from a week or so ago. Owner, counter staff, whoever is in first and has a cup of tea going.

You will need a record so nobody gets missed or asked twice. Order number, name, date the email went, four columns in a spreadsheet. It feels primitive, and it is, but the spreadsheet ends up being a better compliance record than the automation would have given you, because it is a dated list of every single person you asked and it shows on its face that you did not skip anybody.

The timing, which we got wrong first go

Andrew set the email to send four days after the order. Fine if the flowers went out that same afternoon. A disaster if they did not.

People book ahead, particularly for birthdays and anniversaries, so within a fortnight we had customers who had ordered two weeks in advance receiving an email asking how the flowers were, days before the flowers had even left the bench. They were ringing us in a genuine panic assuming something had been delivered to the wrong person, or that we had sent their surprise early and ruined it.

Seven to ten days after the order is the number that fixed it. If your system can trigger off the delivery date rather than the order date, use that instead, because the delivery date is the right field and the order date is a workaround for not having it. Most small shops do not have it, so seven to ten days is the number.

Where it got to, and what is still broken

Ten months on we are at 4.1 from more than 1,100 reviews, and they come in most days now rather than most months.

I am not going to write that up as a triumph, because 4.1 is not a triumph, it is a business that was in real trouble and is now merely alright. Thirty-eight per cent of those reviews are still negative. If you go and read them, and I would rather you did than take my word for it, the same two complaints come round again and again: the bunch looked smaller than the photo on the website, and nobody told them it had been delivered.

Which is a bit awkward, given I spent a whole section of this article telling you to photograph every arrangement before it leaves the bench and email it to the person who paid for it. The two things our own customers complain about most are the two things that fixes. We are working on it and we are not there yet, and I would rather say so here than have you find it on the listing and wonder why I left it out.

The bit I genuinely did not see coming was how it felt. There were thousands of people out there who had a perfectly good experience with us and had simply never been asked about it, not once, not in years, and the week we started asking they turned up in droves. Not because we did anything clever. Because we finally gave them a way to say so.

Go and look at the listing yourself. As I write this it says 4.1, and whatever it says on the day you read this, it will not be the same number.

How Far Up the Ladder Is It Worth Going?

Somewhere around day four you will find yourself googling defamation solicitors at eleven at night, and I want to save you that evening. Here is roughly what each option costs, how long it takes, and how often it works. The odds are planning ranges rather than published statistics, and they assume you do the thing properly.

What each move costs you

Ordered by how often it works. Notice that the two cheapest options sit at the top and the most expensive one sits near the bottom.

Keep collecting reviews from everyone	\$
1 to 6 months	60 to 90%
Public reply plus real service recovery	\$
Hours to days	50 to 90% mitigation
Platform report where a real rule was broken	\$
Days to 3 weeks	30 to 75%
Contacting the reviewer once, properly	\$
1 to 14 days	25 to 65%
Fair Trading, for the underlying refund dispute	\$
Weeks to months	Medium, but no removal
Solicitor's letter or a concerns notice	\$\$ to \$\$\$
2 to 8 weeks	20 to 60%

Platform report because the review is simply unfair	\$
Days to weeks	0 to 15%
Defamation proceedings	\$\$\$\$
6 months to years	Wildly merits-dependent
Reporting an ordinary bad review to eSafety	\$
Days to weeks	Near zero

Cost bands: \$ is mostly your own time, under about \$500. \$\$ is \$500 to \$5,000. \$\$\$ is \$5,000 to \$25,000. \$\$\$\$ is above that, with the other side's costs on the table if you lose.

Two of those need a word of explanation. The eSafety Commissioner runs a scheme for severe adult cyber abuse and it explicitly excludes ordinary bad reviews and plain reputational damage, so sending them a one-star complaint about hydrangeas achieves nothing. It becomes relevant if a review or a campaign around it turns into abusive, targeted material aimed at a person, and even then you report to the platform first and keep the ticket.

The other one is copyright. If a competitor lifts your bouquet photographs, you have a copyright matter and there is a proper process for it. Filing a copyright notice to try to remove criticism is not that process, it is a misuse of it, and it can land back on you. Different problem, different form.

11

The Reality Check

After running Lily's Florist since 2009 and growing from one brave florist partner in Murwillumbah to over 800 across Australia, I can tell you this: negative reviews are part of the game. We've won Feefo Service Awards with over 24,000 reviews, and guess what? Not all of them are glowing. Some are ordinary, some are brutal, most are brilliant.

The florists who thrive are not the ones who avoid negative reviews. They are the ones who answer them with enough grace and professionalism that the next person reads the whole exchange and thinks, "Wow, I want to buy from them."

Remember sitting at our dinner table in Kingscliff, making business decisions while our daughter Asha crawled around the floor? We learned early that every customer interaction, especially the difficult ones, shapes your business reputation. Those early lessons from dealing with 40+ phone calls a day in our tiny shop, back when Yellow Pages was still a thing, taught us that how you respond to problems matters more than never having problems at all.

Moving Forward

A 1-star review from someone who never contacted you first isn't ideal, but it's not the end of the world either. Follow these steps:

-
- 01 Cool down before responding
 - 02 Screenshot everything before it can be edited
 - 03 Investigate thoroughly but privately, without assuming a blank search means a fake
 - 04 Respond publicly with grace, professionalism, and nothing that belongs to the customer
 - 05 Reach out privately to resolve, once
 - 06 Report it only where a policy was broken
 - 07 Build systems to prevent future issues
 - 08 Generate enough positive reviews to dilute the negative ones, asking every single customer
-

Most importantly, remember that everyone reading that review and your response is a potential customer. They are working out whether you're the kind of business they want to deal with when something goes wrong. The flowers are almost beside the point by then.

Because something always goes wrong eventually. It's how you handle it that determines whether you're still in business 17 years later, with 800 partners and customers who trust you with their most important moments.

Top Questions Answered

I've seen so many florists in online forums asking the same tough questions. It shows we're all dealing with the same headaches! Here are my short, practical answers to some of the most common scenarios I've seen pop up on places like the small business forums.

What if a review is just plain wrong, claiming we used plastic flowers or something impossible?

This one stings the most because it feels so personal. The key is to respond calmly with facts, not emotion. My go-to line would be something like, *"We're sorry your experience wasn't as expected. The photo we took before delivery shows an all-fresh arrangement, but we'd love to discuss this with you directly."* It shows you have proof without starting a public argument and immediately moves the conversation offline. Do not expect it to come down, though. A claim about what arrived is still treated as the customer's experience.

How do you handle customers who seem to be trying to scam you for free flowers?

What about reviews where the flowers were fine, but didn't match a customer's 'vision'?

What's the best response to a customer threatening to 'ruin us' with bad reviews?

A former staff member left us a one-star review. Can we do anything?

We got five bad reviews in one weekend after a social media argument. What now?

Someone said we should file a DMCA takedown on the review. Should we?

Should I just turn reviews off?

Further Reading

A while back I wrote an article on an awesome hack for getting real Google reviews for your business listing, for free. It still works. The one thing I would add to it now, having spent a month buried in platform policy for this piece, is to be careful about when the request goes out. A review link in the order confirmation email arrives before the flowers do, and a review of a delivery that has not happened yet is a review of nothing. Send it after the delivery lands, send it to everybody, and it is a genuinely good tactic.

Lily's Florist delivers Australia-wide through a network of 800+ partner florists.
24,000+ verified reviews collected through Feefo, which we cannot edit or delete.
Questions? Ring 1300 360 469, 7am to 6pm weekdays and 10am Saturdays.

Sources

Platform policies and consumer law guidance change. These were checked on 4 August 2026 and are worth rechecking whenever you have a live incident.

- 1 ACCC, Online reviews for products and services (<https://www.accc.gov.au/business/advertising-and-promotions/online-reviews-for-product-and-services>). The starting point for what Australian businesses may and may not do with reviews.
- 2 Google, Prohibited and restricted content, Maps user-generated content policy (<https://support.google.com/contributionpolicy/answer/7400114>). The full list of grounds for reporting a review.
- 3 Google, Fake engagement policy (<https://support.google.com/contributionpolicy/answer/11414422>). Covers competitor reviews, conflicts of interest, and selectively soliciting positive reviews.
- 4 ACCC media releases and Federal Court outcomes in the Meriton Property Services matter, on review invitation masking, and the HealthEngine matter, on withheld and edited reviews.
- 5 Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (Cth), Schedule 2, the Australian Consumer Law, sections 18, 29, 33 and 34. Available on the Federal Register of Legislation.
- 6 ACCC, Fines and penalties, for the penalty maximums applying to conduct on or after 28 March 2026.
- 7 ProductReview.com.au posting guidelines, reporting process and verification policy.
- 8 ProductReview.com.au, Brand Management plans and features (<https://www.productreview.com.au/for-businesses/brand-management/plans-and-features>), and its published operating model. Source for the free versus paid split, the 50-invitation entry cap, the supported integrations and the quote-only pricing, checked 4 August 2026.
- 9 Our own ProductReview.com.au listing (<https://www.productreview.com.au/listings/lily-s-florist>), cited in section 10. 1.1 in October 2025, 4.1 from 1,109 reviews as at 4 August 2026.

- 10 Feefo review and moderation policies, covering purchaser verification and the categories it will moderate.
- 11 Trustpilot business flagging guidance and Content Integrity process; Yelp content guidelines and its prohibition on businesses requesting reviews.
- 12 eSafety Commissioner, Adult Cyber Abuse Scheme guidance, which excludes ordinary bad reviews and purely reputational damage; and *Kabbabe v Google LLC* [2020] FCA 126 on identifying an anonymous reviewer.

About the Authors

Andrew, Ivy, Siobhan and Asha. Hobart, June 2024.

Siobhan Thomson

Co-founded Lily's Florist with Andrew in 2009. Grew up in Taree, moved from Sydney to Kingscliff in 2006 to buy a flower and gift shop neither of them knew how to run, and spent the first year on the phone learning. Mum to Asha and Ivy. She reads the Feefo reviews, including the ones she would rather not.

Andrew Thomson

Co-founded Lily's Florist in 2009 after buying the Kingscliff shop in 2006. Built the partner network from one florist in Murwillumbah to more than 800, and still runs it from Kingscliff. Handles the websites, the commission arrangements and the partner relationships.

Anna

Qualified florist, trained in North Carolina, with more than fifteen years of hands-on bench experience. Took inbound calls and processed orders from the Pottsville home office between April 2010 and June 2013, Australia-wide. Now handles the books, and still knows exactly which stem is lying to you.

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