

How Canberra Judges a Tradie

We read every written Google review left for 632 Canberra and Queanbeyan trade businesses over five years. 22,255 of them. This is what people write when the job is done, in their own words, sorted into the things they praise and the things they complain about.

Give me ten minutes of your attention and you will know two things: the types of things your customers are most likely to write about you, and which of the things they hardly ever write about that could be the reason they pick you.

The one thing to know

Customers write about two things: the job, and how you treated them. Just over half of all reviews talk about the quality of the work. Just over half talk about manners: being polite, respectful and easy to deal with. Nine businesses in ten have at least one review saying the work was good.

Everything else barely gets a mention. About one review in five says the tradie turned up on time. About one in ten mentions a clear quote. One in twenty mentions being kept in the loop, and one in twenty-five mentions honesty. Fewer than four businesses in ten have a single review saying the customer was told the tradie was on the way.

What we reckon. "Good work, nice bloke" is the bare minimum. Nearly everyone's reviews say it, so when a customer puts your listing next to the next tradie's, it tells them nothing. Your reviews are the only words on your Google listing you didn't write yourself, and most of them say the same two things as everyone else's. The stuff that hardly ever gets mentioned is where you can stand out: a text before you arrive, a quote that held, a floor left clean. It's also the cheapest stuff on this list. A name for good work takes years to earn. A text saying you're on your way takes ten seconds to send. Reviews can't prove that wins you the job. What they can show is what a customer sees when they put two listings side by side, and we can show you that.

Five things you want, and what the reviews say about each

Each check takes a few minutes and uses what you've already got: your last ten reviews, your last quote, your last complaint.

1. You want to be judged on the work. You mostly will be.

The work itself is what Canberra customers write about most. Just over half of all reviews mention it, and nine businesses in ten have at least one review that does.

One carpet cleaner's customer wrote about old stains other cleaners couldn't shift, and carpets that came up almost like new. That's what a good review of the work looks like: the result, in the words of the person who lives with it.

Check yours. Read your last ten reviews and count how many describe the finished job. If most of them say "great service" and nothing about the work, the work isn't what people remember.

What this can't tell you: whether the work was actually any good.

2. You don't want to be the tradie who didn't turn up.

Turning up when you said you would gets a mention in about one review in five, and about six businesses in ten have at least one review that says it. Keeping the customer posted, the on-my-way text and the call when the job's running late, is rarer again: about one review in twenty, at fewer than four businesses in ten.

One customer said it in thirteen words: "They advise you when they are on their way to do the job."

What we reckon. When something hardly shows up in reviews, it can mean two things. Nobody does it, or everybody does it and nobody bothers writing it down. Counting by business sorts that out. If the on-my-way text was normal, a business with fifty reviews would pick up a mention somewhere, and more than six businesses in ten have none. Send "on my way, twenty minutes" and you've given the customer something to write about. On most listings, theirs will be the only review that says it.

Check yours. Take your last enquiry and follow it through: who answered it, what was promised, and when the customer next heard from you. Then ask whether anyone told them you were on the way.

What this can't tell you: how often tradies run late. Customers only mention it when they think to.

3. You want the quote to be the price.

Hardly anyone complains about price: fewer than one review in a hundred, at about one business in eight. And what people praise isn't cheap. It's knowing what they're paying for. Customers saying things were explained clearly come up in about one review in ten, at just over half of all businesses.

A plumbing customer wrote that a fixed price up front made the job easy to budget for, with no hidden charges and no surprises. In the same review they praised the listening, the advice, the work and the clean-up.

What we reckon. Few price complaints doesn't mean price doesn't matter. People who thought you were too dear mostly didn't hire you, so they never left a review. What the reviews do show is that the people who did hire you remember whether the price held, and they write about it when it did.

Check yours. Read your last quote as if you'd never spoken to the customer. Can you see what's included, what isn't, the price, and what happens if something changes once the wall's open? If you can't, neither can they.

What this can't tell you: whether price decides who gets the job. Reviews are written after the job, by people who said yes.

4. You want the customer to walk in and use it.

Finishing when you said you would comes up in about one review in six, and nearly two businesses in three have at least one. Leaving the place clean and looked after comes up in about one review in ten, at just over half of all businesses.

A painting customer wrote that the painter quoted when he said he would, finished on time so they could move in, and worked around the carpet layers and the other trades. A pest control customer wrote that

the result was worth a three-week wait. The review doesn't say whether anyone told them about the wait up front.

What we reckon. Look at what the painting customer actually wrote: the finish date, the other trades sorted, and the day they moved in. Someone reading that can picture their own job going the same way. "Great job" doesn't give them that.

Check yours. Agree a finish date the customer can plan around, say who's sorting the other trades, and walk the job with them at the end. Leave it ready to use, and tell them the one thing to keep an eye on.

What this can't tell you: how often jobs run over. A customer whose job finished a week late might just never leave a review.

5. You don't want the complaint that nobody owns.

Complaints are rare in Google reviews of Canberra tradies. Complaints about the work come up in fewer than two reviews in a hundred (about one business in five has at least one), and complaints about how someone was treated in fewer than one in a hundred. Rare doesn't mean harmless. One bad review can sit at the top of your listing for years.

One installation review praised the quick install and the communication, then described a rough hole cut in the wall and an argument over a faulty part. The business later agreed to replace the part and patch the wall, and the customer said they'd update the review once that was done. Good communication and an unfixed problem, in the same review.

What we reckon. That review is what most of the bad ones we read look like. Not one thing going wrong, but one thing going wrong that nobody fixed. The customer gives credit for the communication and still can't get past the part. Nobody owned the problem, and that's the bit you control.

Check yours. Take your last complaint, whether it came in a review or on the phone. Who owned it, what was the next step, and who checked the fix was done? If you can't name all three, the next one will go the same way.

What this can't tell you: how often things go wrong. Reviews only show the complaints people chose to write.

Choose one change

Write down one thing you found, what you'll do about it and who's doing it. Pick something you can check next month: whether the enquiry got answered, whether the on-my-way text went, whether the quote said what wasn't included. Then read your next ten reviews and see if it shows up.

Where Well Handled comes in

Some of what's in this report is yours alone to fix: the work itself, how you handle a complaint, what goes on the invoice. Well Handled doesn't touch those.

Where we come in is the bit between the phone ringing and the customer hearing back, and what a stranger sees before they ever ring.

The call you didn't hear. You're up a ladder or under a house and the phone rings out. Well Handled's missed-call service texts the caller back straight away, so the job doesn't go to the next tradie on the list.

The quote that went quiet. Follow-up messages keep an unsigned quote moving, so the customer hears from you before they go looking elsewhere.

What a stranger reads before they ring. The things that hardly get mentioned in reviews (the on-my-way text, a quote that held, a clean finish) are exactly what your website and Google profile can say plainly. We build and look after both.

The reviews themselves. Asking every customer for a review, the same way, with no incentive and no picking, means that over time your reviews say more than "good work, nice bloke".

What do your own reviews say?

Text a link to your Google listing to **0495 032 269**, or email it to **kai@wellhandled.au**. You'll get one page on your own reviews: what your customers write about, how that compares with this research, and one thing worth trying. If you haven't got enough reviews to say anything honest, we'll tell you.

How we did this

What we read. We searched Google for Canberra tradies and found 839 listings. Once we merged listings that shared the same reviews and dropped the ones we couldn't use, that left 632 businesses. We pulled five years of their Google reviews and kept 22,255 written ones from customers, or people who'd asked for a quote. Star-only reviews, reviews in other languages and anything not written by a customer were left out.

How we sorted them. We sorted every review into topics from a fixed list of 24, marking each mention as praise or a complaint and tying it to the reviewer's own words. Every review where it wasn't clear who wrote it or whether it belonged, 2,474 of them, was checked one by one. Only the 12 topics that passed every accuracy check have numbers in this report.

How solid the numbers are. The five businesses with the most reviews make up nearly a quarter of them. Take those five out and no figure here moves by more than about two in a hundred. Counting every business equally, instead of every review, moves a few figures by around five in a hundred. So treat the figures as close, not exact. We also can't say things are getting better: for businesses reviewed in both the earlier and later years, praise for the work barely moved.

What reviews can't show. People choose whether to write a review, and we can't confirm every reviewer was a real customer. Some businesses ask happy customers to post one, and we don't know which. A mention isn't the same as a happy customer, and nothing here proves a change will win you more work. "Canberra" means the business is here, not that every job was. The examples were picked because they had detail, not because they're typical. Names are left out, but the words can still be found on Google.

Checking our work. The full technical method, the topic list and every check are written up, and we checked the examples against the original reviews on 21 September 2026. Think a figure's wrong? Tell us which section through wellhandled.au and we'll look at it.

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