STOREPOLICYCHECK · 2026 EMPIRICAL WHITEPAPER & PRE-APPEAL CHECKLIST

2026 Shopify Google Merchant Center Misrepresentation Benchmark & Jan 31, 2027 500×500 Image Audit Guide

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Executive Summary (TL;DR): Before clicking *"Request Review"* inside Google Merchant Center (and risking a 7-day or longer review cooldown), US/USD Shopify merchants should eliminate objective, publicly verifiable storefront contradictions. Based on our 10-store blind zero-false-positive calibration baseline plus live anonymized audits, the highest-frequency public triggers are: (1) Shopify's default Refund Policy omitting who pays return shipping, (2) announcement bar vs. shipping policy threshold drift, (3) `?variant=` visible price vs. `ProductGroup` JSON-LD Offer mismatch caused by bundle/subscription/currency apps, and (4) legacy product photos smaller than Google's upcoming **January 31, 2027 500×500 px** minimum requirement.

1. 15-Point Pre-Appeal Public Storefront Verification Checklist

1. **Shipping Policy Reachability (/policies/shipping-policy):** Returns HTTP 200 and explicitly discloses order handling time, US transit time, and exact USD shipping rates.
2. **Return-Shipping Payer Disclosure (/policies/refund-policy):** Explicitly states whether the merchant or customer pays return shipping for standard change-of-mind returns (matching GMC Return Settings).
3. **Free-Shipping Threshold Parity:** Announcement bar, product page tabs, and `/policies/shipping-policy` quote the exact same US dollar threshold.
4. **Return Window Parity:** Footer badges, product accordions, and refund policy declare identical initiation days (e.g., 30 days from delivery).
5. **Return & Restocking Fee Parity:** Never advertise "Free Returns" if the refund policy deducts label or restocking fees.
6. **Active `?variant=` Price vs. JSON-LD `Offer.price`:** Visible buy-box USD price matches exact `ProductGroup.hasVariant` JSON-LD price & `priceCurrency: "USD"`.
7. **Conflicting Shopify Plugin Audit:** Verify Recharge, Seal Subscriptions, Kaching Bundles, WideBundle, Transcy, Weglot, PageFly, and GemPages do not alter visible prices without syncing JSON-LD.
8. **Jan 31, 2027 500×500 px Image Compliance:** Audit all catalog SKUs via `/products.json?limit=250` and replace any primary or gallery image below 500×500 px (recommended 1500×1500

px).

9. **Prohibited Medical & Miracle Claims:** Remove unsubstantiated phrases ("100% cure", "FDA approved" without clearance, "guaranteed permanent results").
10. **Footer & Navigation Link Integrity:** Zero 404 broken links on policy or contact pages.
11. **Public Contact Transparency:** Matching brand-domain support email, physical business address, phone/hours, and valid `mailto:`/`tel:` links.
12. **Leftover Foreign / Agency Email Audit:** Remove unrelated domains from `/policies/terms-of-service` and `/policies/privacy-policy`.
13. **Template Placeholder Cleanup:** Zero `[Insert Store Name]` or `Lorem ipsum` strings across live pages.
14. **RFC 9309 `robots.txt` Access:** Confirm `Googlebot`, `Storebot-Google`, and `Googlebot-Image` can crawl `/products/` and `/policies/`.
15. **Storefront Password & Multi-Market Isolation:** Confirm `/password` is disabled and US shoppers see clean USD pricing.

2. Objective 2026 Shopify GMC Audit Tool Comparison (8 Tools)

Tool	Pricing Model	App / OAuth Needed?	Verbatim Diff & JSON-LD	500×500 CSV & Plugin Check
StorePolicyCheck storepolicycheck.com	**$29 one-time** (14 days, 5 re-scans; $0 if clean)	**No** (100% read-only URL + free MCP)	Yes (2 hard conflicts free; exact ?variant= JSON-LD diff)	**Yes** (free 250-SKU CSV + 8-family plugin fingerprint)
AdNabu Checker	Free basic score (upsells feed app)	No for URL tool	Surface trust-page score only	No dedicated 500×500 CSV sweep
ClearCheck Compliance	Recurring Shopify App subscription	Yes (Shopify Admin install)	In-app policy & compliance checks	General in-app checks
ComplianceGuard AI	Recurring Shopify App subscription	Yes (Shopify Admin install)	AI keyword & trust signal alerts	In-app bot simulation
ShieldKit	Recurring Shopify/Woo subscription	Yes (Shopify/Woo app)	Limited free tier; paid tiers	In-app product compliance
ShopMCP	Developer / SaaS tiers	Yes (API tokens + MCP setup)	Agent queries over connected APIs	Requires custom agent prompts
GMC Scout	Recurring monthly (€29/mo tier)	No (URL scanner)	Counts free; details gated	General storefront signals
UnlockMerchantCenter / Proofmerce	$49–$799/mo or manual audit	Account signup / manual intake	Paid tiers or human turnaround	Paid tiers / manual review

3. Free Read-Only Diagnostic Links & Developer Resources

- **Full 15-Rule Storefront Verifier:** https://storepolicycheck.com/
- **Free 250-SKU Jan 31, 2027 500×500 Image Checker (CSV):** https://storepolicycheck.com/tools/gmc-image-size-checker
- **Free `?variant=` JSON-LD Price & Plugin Detector:** https://storepolicycheck.com/tools/shopify-variant-json-ld-price-checker
- **Free Shopify `robots.txt` RFC 9309 Tester:** https://storepolicycheck.com/tools/shopify-robots-txt-googlebot-tester
- **Live Empirical Benchmark & JSON Feed:** storepolicycheck.com/research/shopify-gmc-misrepresentation-benchmark-2026
- **Public Google Docs Checklist Mirror:** docs.google.com/document/.../pub

- **Public Google Sites Resource Hub:** https://sites.google.com/view/storepolicycheck
- **Open-Source Zero-Credential MCP Server:** https://github.com/woodfuturebj-boop/storepolicycheck-mcp

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