R POWER REVIEWS

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

From Reviews to Revenue

*How Ratings and Reviews
Influence Sales*

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1. Is there a difference in impact for funded reviews (e.g., "I received a sample to review") vs. unfunded reviews (e.g. "I bought a product and want to review it).

Northwestern didn't specifically study the impact of incentivized vs non-incentivized reviews. However, on the PowerReviews platform, all reviews from verified buyers and those receiving incentives are clearly marked for authenticity. There's a badge to identify contributors who have received samples or incentives to write a review on a product. Also, PowerReviews has seen a review collection rate as high as 85% for clients who send a sample to customers.

2. For ecommerce sites that are related to giving back and charities does it work the same? Do reviews have same impact?

We didn't take on these types of sites, so we don't have data to support the answer. For smaller donors, consumer reviews would likely be similarly influential as in for-profit examples. But for major gifts, the process would more likely mirror that of a B2B prospect, who would use word of mouth feedback from other customers/donors.

3. Any ideas on how to get reviews when you don't have an ecommerce site?

A lot of PowerReviews clients don't have eCommerce sites and are able to capture reviews. One way to capture reviews is through product sampling programs. Another way is to capture email addresses in-store or through an existing loyalty program to send Post Purchase Emails.

4. Does the length of the review matters? If yes. Does the impact of the length differs from different product categories?

The Northwestern research team found that the ideal number of reviews depends on the length of the reviews themselves. When reviews are shorter, more reviews matter. When reviews are longer, however, the number of reviews has a less significant impact.

5. Should reviews be sorted by "type" of reviewer (eg. age groups)?

The study did not address that.

6. Did you find a difference in star study when looking at B2B vs B2C? Or would you say the rating importance is the same across the board?

We looked at quite a few B2C categories and found the 4.2 to 4.6 star rating "value" holds across all of them, so it's intuitive to believe that it's driven by consistent and fundamental human behaviors. We believe a study of B2B reviews would have similar conclusions. However, reviews from experienced professionals are far more common in B2B buying. It would be rare for a B2B prospect not to ask a former or current user of a vendor's product or service, which would likely add a great deal of influence to the purchase.

6. Is PowerReviews capable to connect social media profiles with reviews and show reviews from friends first?

No, not currently.

7. What type of review platform do you feel customers trust the most? Google? Yelp? Angies List? Bing? I've always felt Google was the most trustworthy but they've recently made a lot of changes to their algorithm and what they are showing in search results.

To clarify, the "star" ratings that show up in Google search results are sourced from third party sites; they don't reside on Google. PowerReviews syndicates review content to Google, which helps improve SEO. Star ratings can then also appear in Product Listing Ads.

Google Seller Ratings (ratings on the seller, not the product) can appear in Google search results and must originate on a third party site (not the retailer site).

Consumers often use search to initiate their research and go to the sites that contain ratings and reviews based on search results (which is why Syndication to search providers is essential). Based on search results, they will often go to retailer sites to read the reviews and to look at availability, price, etc. Consumers also often visit brand sites to validate the information they read on retailer sites.

The consumer journey isn't a straight path -- most consumers look on multiple sites before making their purchase. This is why making sure reviews are available and syndicated to Google is essential.

8. Is it true regarding to restaurants? It seems that 5-star rating restaurants always illustrate people to try.

While we did not specifically study restaurants, a similar conclusion would likely be met upon further study. Fake reviews on Yelp and in the UK have made consumers more wary than ever about the possibility of fake reviews. When you have a wide array of reviews (both positive and negative), buyer confidence increases.

9. Were you able to tease out the impact of early reviews? Did the first reviews impact the overall rating of the product and the purchase decisions?

The study did not address this.

10. If I have 100 products, how many total reviews and/ or how many reviews per product should I obtain before displaying reviews as a feature at all?

This study didn't explore the effect of having a review displayed at all vs. no reviews. However, previous PowerReviews research found that almost all shoppers (95%) consult customer reviews, so displaying reviews is important.