

Mapping the Path to Purchase

How today's consumers navigate the shopping journey



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Introduction

From Amazon and Google to brand and retailer sites, today's consumers have nearly limitless options when it comes to researching and purchasing products. But in the age of the ultra-educated, information-hungry consumer, how do consumers decide where to start, continue, and complete their shopping journey?

In 2016, PowerReviews conducted a survey of American consumers to better understand the path they take when making a purchase. The following report explores:

- Where shoppers start their purchase journey
- Why consumers choose the shopping channels they do
- Where shoppers go if they can't find what they're looking for
- How shoppers decide whether to make their final purchase online or in-store

This study uncovers meaningful shopper insights to answer unknowns such as what keeps shoppers onsite and what causes them to leave. It also reveals the shortcomings of the most popular shopping destinations on the web, straight from the consumers who use them.

The purchase journey is often complex. By better understanding what consumers want, brands and retailers are better equipped to provide shoppers with the information they're looking for. And by providing this information, brands and retailers are better equipped to attract shoppers—and convert those browsers into buyers.

A person with a backpack is sitting on a large rock, looking out over a lake and mountains at sunset. The sky is filled with colorful clouds in shades of blue, purple, and orange. The person is wearing a plaid shirt and a cap. The overall scene is serene and contemplative.

Where Consumers Start the Purchase Journey

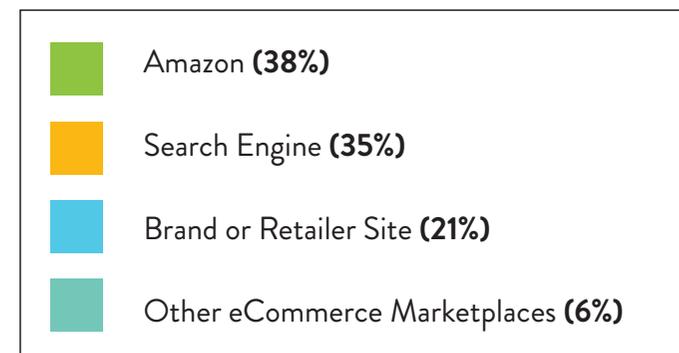


Where Consumers Start the Purchase Journey

Though there are nearly endless options, shoppers are starting the purchase journey through four main channels:

- Amazon
- Search Engines
- Brand and Retail Sites
- Other eCommerce Marketplaces

Amazon tops the list of preferred channels, with 38% of consumers noting that the eCommerce giant is their top choice for starting the shopping journey. More than one-third (35%) say they prefer to start shopping on a search engine, and an additional 21% indicate that a brand or retailer site is their top choice. The remaining 6% of consumers prefer to start the shopping journey on another eCommerce marketplace such as Jet.com, eBay, or Etsy.



A man and a woman are hiking on a rocky trail. The man, wearing a plaid shirt and shorts, is sitting on a rock and looking at a smartphone. The woman, wearing a dark tank top and shorts, is sitting next to him, also looking at the phone. They are both wearing hiking boots and have backpacks. The background shows a rocky landscape with a body of water in the distance under a cloudy sky.

The Amazon Shopper



The Amazon Shopper

Amazon is the most popular place for shoppers to start the purchase journey, with 38% of surveyed consumers indicating that it was their preference. But why are shoppers starting on Amazon?

Shoppers Turn to Amazon for Variety, Deals, and Information

Shoppers have many reasons for starting their search on Amazon, but the presence of a large volume of ratings and reviews is a top factor. More than half (55%) of consumers say reviews play a big role in why they start the purchase journey

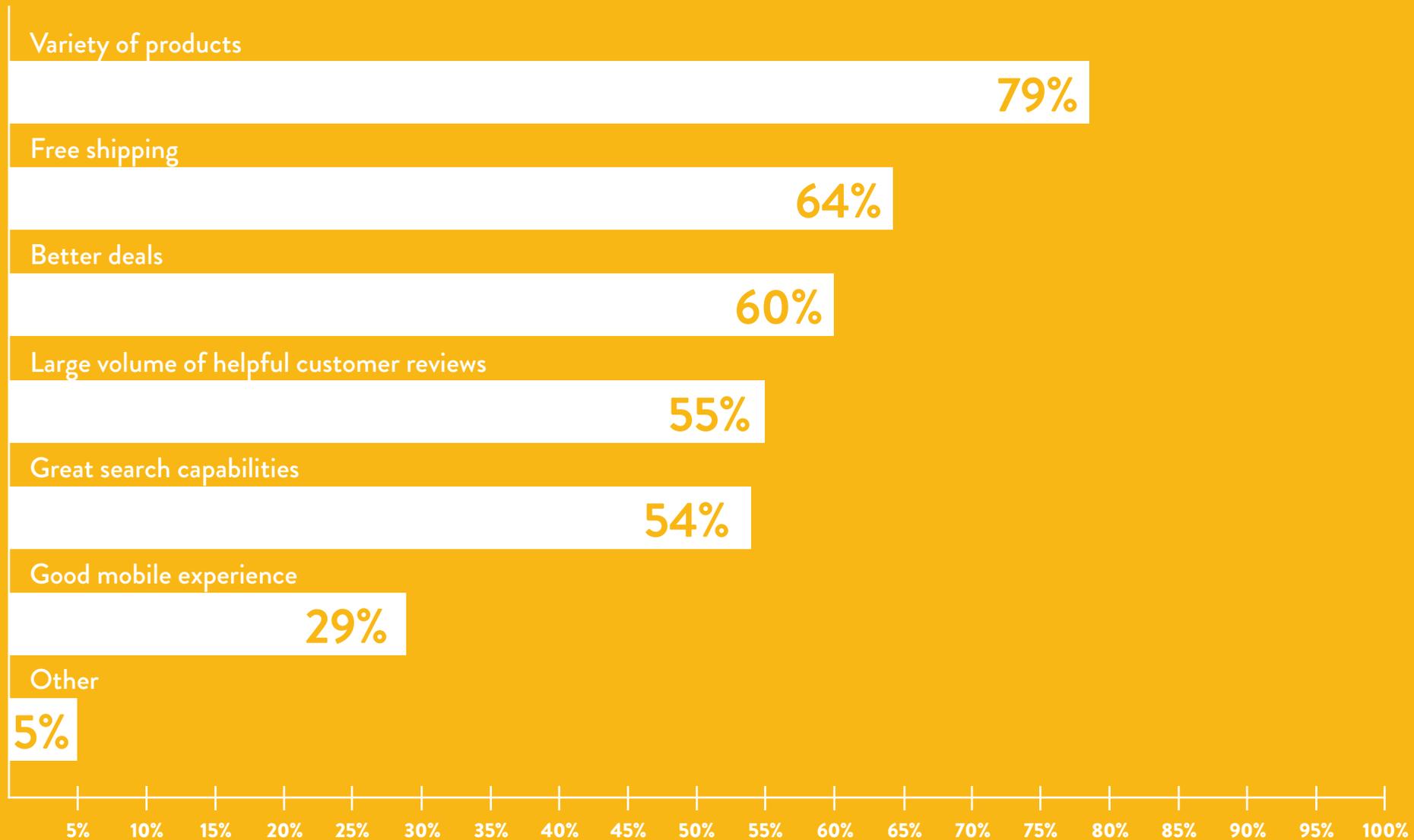
on Amazon. Other top reasons include variety of products (79%) and pricing factors like free shipping (64%) and good deals (60%).

It's become difficult—if not impossible—for the majority of brands and retailers to compete against Amazon when it comes to inventory, price, and shipping. However, there's a big opportunity for brands and retailers to stand out by providing differentiated experiences, driven by high quality, comprehensive product information including user-generated content such as ratings and reviews.

Why Shoppers Start on Amazon

Inventory, price, and reviews attract shoppers

(Select all that apply)

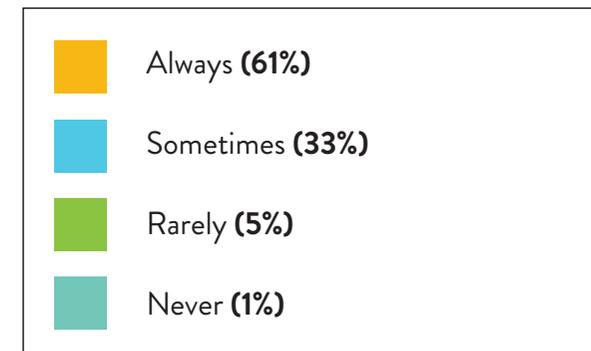




Reviews are Key for Amazon Shoppers

It's clear that reviews dominate the Amazon customer experience. As previously mentioned, more than half (55%) of consumers cited a large volume of helpful reviews as one of the reasons they start their purchase journey on Amazon. Once they've landed on Amazon.com, a majority of shoppers turn to reviews to help them make an informed purchase decision. Nearly two-thirds (61%) of shoppers say they always read reviews on Amazon, with an additional 33% sometimes reading reviews. Only 6% of shoppers say they rarely or never read reviews when shopping on Amazon.

In addition to attracting consumers to the site, reviews also play a key role in keeping shoppers on Amazon to finalize their purchase. A huge 92% of shoppers who start their purchase journey on Amazon typically make their final purchase on the site, too.





The Google Shopper



The Google Shopper

More than a third (35%) of shoppers choose to start the purchase journey on a search engine. But Google is likely to return hundreds of results for any given search. Where are shoppers going next?

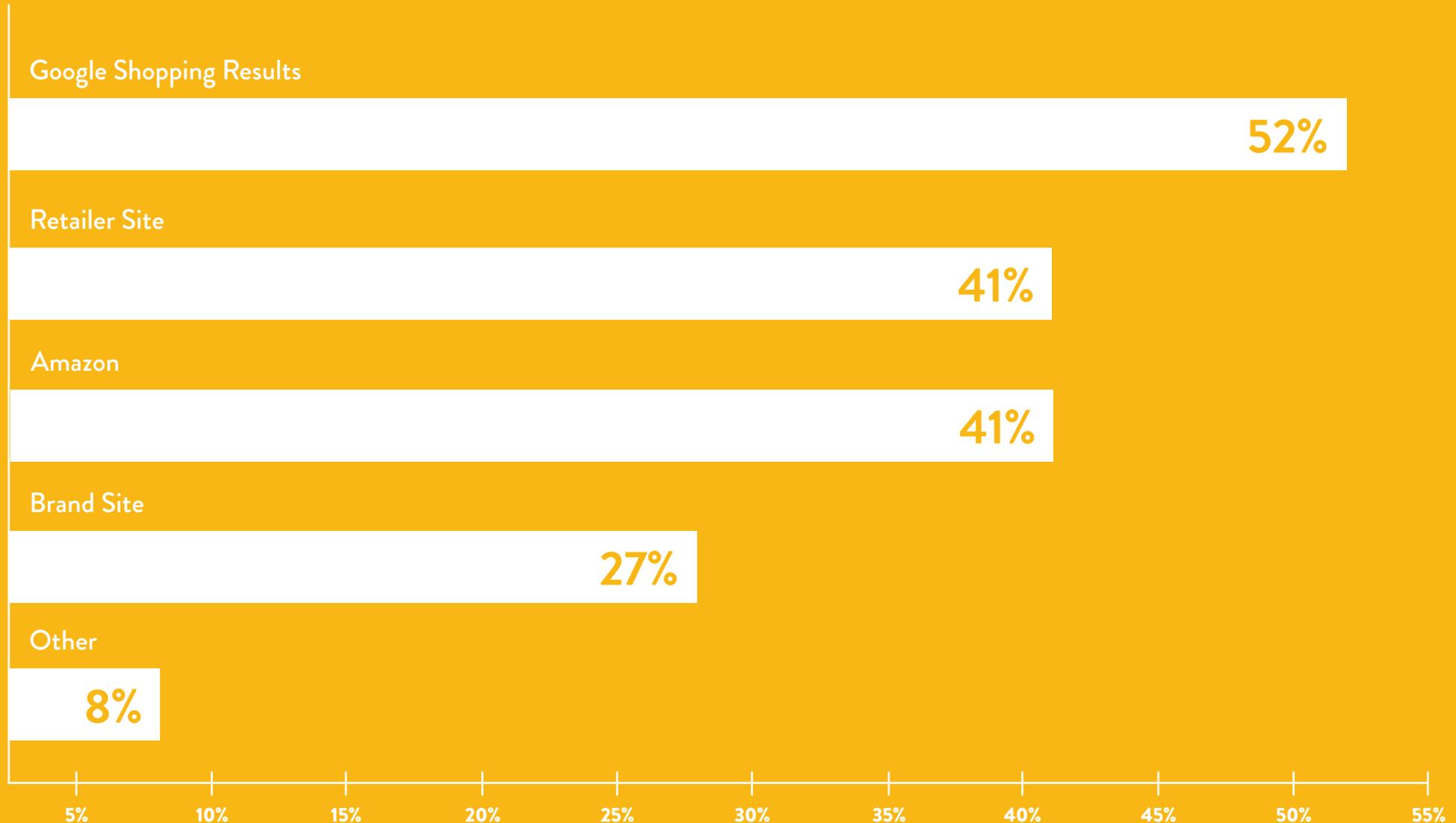
Shoppers Click to Google Shopping Results

More than half (52%) of consumers that start their shopping journey on a search engine said they're likely to click on the Google Shopping Results. 41% said they'd click through to Amazon, 41% would click to a retailer site, and 27% would click to a brand site. These results are encouraging for retailers, since consumers who start on Google are just as likely to purchase on a retailer site as they are to purchase on Amazon.

With more than a third of shoppers starting the shopping journey on a search engine, it's crucial for brands and retailers to have a strong presence on Google. Start leveraging ratings and reviews to improve your search engine optimization (SEO) and increase organic traffic to your site. Ratings and reviews provide fresh information from qualified buyers directly on your product pages, where search engines can crawl it and customers can find it. Plus, adding rich snippets can help significantly improve click through rates for Product Listing Ads.

Where Shoppers Go After Google

(Select all that apply)





The Brand and Retail Site Shopper



The Brand and Retail Site Shopper

One-fifth (21%) of shoppers start their online purchase journey on a brand or retailer website. Why do these shoppers bypass Google, Amazon, and other eCommerce marketplaces in favor of a brand or retailer website?

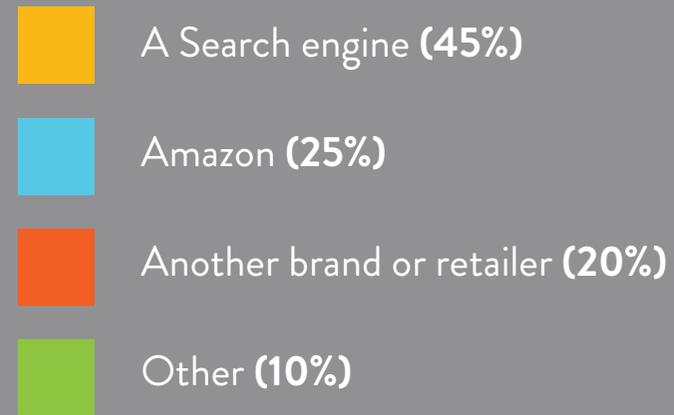
Ease and Loyalty Attract Shoppers

Ease and loyalty top the list of reasons why consumers choose to start shopping on a brand or retailer website. More than half (56%) of shoppers say they start shopping on a brand or retailer website because it's easier to find what they're looking for. And 48% stated that they're a past customer, loyal to the brand or retailer.

As this study has found, shoppers choose Amazon because of the variety of products available, pricing concerns such as free shipping, and product reviews. If you can't compete on variety of products, free shipping, or better deals, reviews are the number one way to attract consumers — and to get those consumers to convert. User-generated content including ratings and reviews and Q&A provide a differentiated experience to your customers. And great experiences will cultivate brand loyalists who will come back to your site again and again.

Reviews Make or Break the Site Experience

Where shoppers go if they can't find reviews





Reviews Make or Break the Site Experience

Once shoppers are on a brand or retailer site, it's key to provide them with all the information they're looking for about your products. If you don't, you risk shoppers going elsewhere to find what they're looking for.

Nearly half (45%) of shoppers say they'll turn to a search engine if there aren't reviews (or aren't enough reviews) for a product on a brand or retailer site. 25% of consumers are likely to head to Amazon to find reviews, and 20% will leave for another brand or retailer site.

Consumers Still Want to Purchase In-Store

It's no secret that online sales continue to creep up on in-store sales. And a big reason for this is the growth of mobile. However, it's important to remember that while online retail sales keep growing, many consumers still opt to buy in-store.

Of those consumers that start the purchase journey on a brand or retailer's site, nearly half (45%) will finalize their purchase elsewhere. But this isn't necessarily reason for alarm.



Of shoppers who start on a brand or retailer website but don't make their final purchase there, nearly half (48%) prefer to make their final purchase in-store. This points to the importance of marrying the online and in-store experience so shoppers can find the information they need, regardless of whether they choose to shop online or in-store.

If you have brick and mortar stores, leverage them as a unique advantage. For example, offer your customers the option of reserving and paying for merchandise online, then picking the items up in-store. Or consider providing store location information, along with reviews, in retargeting campaigns.

Remember: providing shoppers with a great shopping experience across channels is an area where brands and retailers can shine—and effectively compete against Amazon. Your products might come with a higher price tag, but shoppers are willing to pay more if they know they'll get a better experience. In fact, a study from Oracle found that 81% of shoppers are willing to pay more for a better customer experience.¹

1. Oracle, Why Customer Satisfaction is No Longer Enough.

48% of shoppers who start on a brand or retailer website but don't make their final purchase there prefer to make their final purchase in-store.

4 Recommendations for Brands and Retailers

The findings of this study point to practical recommendations for brands and retailers to better attract shoppers—and keep them within their ecosystem.

1

Make Reviews Front and Center

User-generated content (UGC) like ratings and reviews and Q&A gives shoppers the information they need to make informed purchase decisions. Prominently feature ratings and reviews on product detail pages, category pages, and even on your homepage to attract shoppers to your site—and keep them there to finalize their purchase.

2

Amplify Your Presence on Google

Ratings and reviews and Q&A help ensure your product pages are displaying in search engine results by improving relevance and freshness of content with keyword-rich, permanent assets on those product pages. And rich snippets increase click through rates of Product Listing Ads. In addition Seller Ratings allow you to display stars in search results to capture the attention of more shoppers.

3

Deliver a Differentiated Customer Experience

Stop trying to compete with Amazon on price or shipping. Instead, start competing on customer experience. By providing a differentiated experience for your customers throughout the shopping journey, you'll cultivate brand loyalists who are willing to pay more to receive the superior service they've come to expect from your company.

4

Marry the Online and In-Store Experience

Many shoppers are still opting to purchase in-store. And previous PowerReviews research found that 54% of consumers use their mobile device to look for product reviews while shopping in-store.¹ Make sure shoppers can easily find the information they're looking for, regardless of whether they're shopping from their computers, their mobile devices, or in-store.

1. PowerReviews, The Retail Revolution Report, 2015.



About the research

This report is based on a survey and subsequent analysis of 1,034 American consumers from April 2016, developed with the goal of better understanding how consumers navigate the shopping journey.

About PowerReviews

PowerReviews works with more than 1,000 global brands and retailers to increase conversion and improve products and the customer experience with ratings and reviews and Q&A software. Ratings and reviews solutions from PowerReviews are essential for consumers as they search and shop online and in-store, and they are proven to increase online site-wide sales up to 17%.

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www.powerreviews.com

info@powerreviews.com

[@PowerofReviews](https://twitter.com/PowerofReviews)

+1 312-447-6100 | +1 844-231-7540 | +44 (0)20-7152-4452

Chicago | San Francisco | London