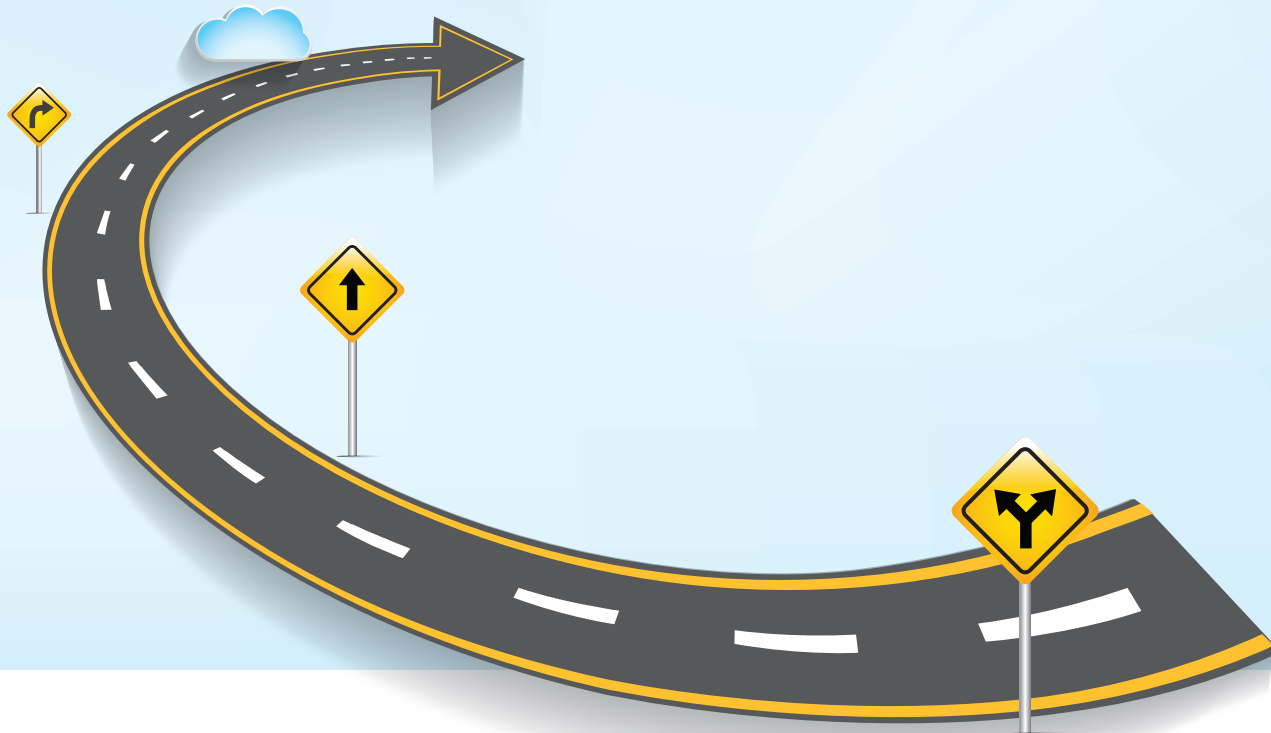# imrg

Learning from online reviews

A report looking at the different stages at which shoppers may leave reviews about experiences they have had with you – and what you can learn from them.

TRUSTPILOT

REVIEWS — NOT JUST ONE-WAY TRAFFIC

When it comes to reviews, the main focus for businesses tends to be around ensuring that the average star rating shows them in a good light — that their business is a trustworthy one from which people can expect a good experience.

That rating is visual and creates an immediate (and, arguably, lasting) impression for people, so it's very important to have a strategy for pushing a rating up as much as possible. But reviews should not be thought about as one-way traffic — just as your prospective customers gain information about areas of your service from them, you too can regard reviews as valuable sources of information.

These are not just opportunities for people to praise your performance or vent their spleen — they can also serve as highly valuable mechanisms for gaining feedback to help you understand how well your business performs, allowing you to adapt accordingly.

Many reviews are specific to a stage of the customer journey — which may relate to a product they purchased, the delivery experience, customer service, and more. This report will examine how to use the different stages of online review feedback to gauge sentiment, how the different review stages yield different information, and what they can tell you about your offering, website, and operations.

Andy Mulcahy
Editor, IMRG

FOREWORD

As technology offers more and more connections between a consumer and a business — either via mobile, social media channels, surveys or reviews, there is an untapped wealth of information businesses can use to improve their performance.

Crucially the resulting business decisions are not being made in a silo via brainstorming sessions or meetings. Instead, these decisions are being made by taking the customer into account directly.

Reviews provide a unique, real-time window into the customer — their likes, dislikes, wants and preferences, and that's what we have built our community on. We believe that customers should be encouraging businesses to improve and those that do are rewarded by good reviews.

But it's not just companies who benefit — customers do too. The customer's voice is king, and online reviews are the new word-of-mouth recommendations.

Unfiltered, honest reviews help other customers make smarter purchasing decisions online. And as businesses place more weight in reviews and care about their trust and reputation, businesses across countries, industries, and the internet will all be working harder to satisfy the customers.

Building trust is our passion, and we're proud to be Europe's largest and fastest-growing review platform.

Alan Duncan
Marketing Director - Europe, Trustpilot

THE FRUSTRATION OF NOT KNOWING

Joe Sherman, Head of Customer Acquisition and Retention, PayAsUGym:

"We wanted to see how our customers feel and what we can be doing online to improve their experience and gain more customers. Online reviews helped us get this insight we were missing. We really appreciate the outside-in look at our company. It helps us shape our business which, ultimately, benefits the customer."

Current PayAsUGym Trustpilot rating - 8.8 (June 2017, based on 750 reviews)

A retailer's website can gather huge amounts of data – tracking what's going on is not necessarily the challenge, it's understanding why something is happening.

Take checkout abandonment rates for example (figure 1). These are overall values – they may differ by device, referring channel or other variables. Information like this is useful for understanding performance, revealing the 'hard' facts on what is happening, but it doesn't on its own demonstrate why it is happening. You can always infer what caused it and, in some cases, may even be able to do so with a reasonable degree of certainty.

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
35%	33%	32%	35%	30%	31%	30%

Figure 1 — Checkout abandonment rates, 2010-16. **Source —** IMRG Capgemini Quarterly Benchmark Q4 2016.

Some metrics however can show little change and seem frustratingly static (see figure 2), particularly if one such metric of yours (conversion rates, for example) has been lagging behind the sector average for a long time. Perhaps the best efforts made in tweaking your merchandising and user experience have had little to no impact on driving it up.
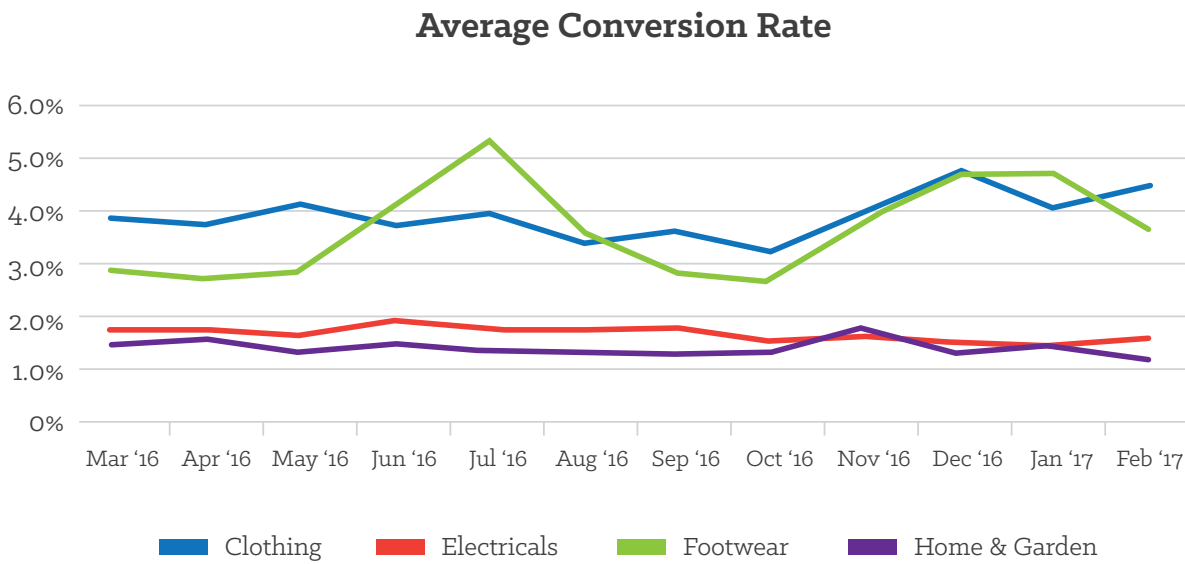
Average Conversion Rate

Figure 2 — Conversion rates, March '16 - Feb '17; clothing, electricals, footwear, home & garden
Source — IMRG Capgemini Sales Index (March)

There are so many factors that may be influencing customer behaviour in the shorter term, some of which cannot be controlled. The season, the weather, even a political situation can affect behaviour and skew results.

But there is one efficient way of establishing the pain points that exist for customers over the longer term, identifying friction points on the path to purchase and establishing any causes of frustration – this method is listening to what customers are saying. Customers are often very willing to give feedback, even if it isn't always entirely positive and businesses can learn from all forms of feedback.

Encouraging reviews

Only 14% are 'very likely' to write an organic review (i.e. unsolicited) but when reviews are actively solicited, the response rate jumps to 29%. (**Source —** Trustpilot, How consumers use reviews today)

In this respect, online reviews are the surveys that you don't need to run. They can reveal, explicitly or implicitly, customers' preferences and what drives their behaviour. When a customer takes the time to express their feelings in more detail, perhaps alongside a star rating, they can give a clear idea of how you could improve the experience, even if that customer did buy something and seems content enough. There is always room for improvement – after all, the pressure in today's highly competitive market is to exceed expectation, not just meet it.

Jim Buckle, COO, Feelunique:

"At Feelunique, we consider customer feedback to be extremely important and review sites are a useful source of feedback. We positively encourage reviews from customers and direct all shoppers to one of several review sites.

"It is one of the ways in which we can regularly 'take the temperature' of our customer experience and check we are meeting our high standards. It provides a way for customers to raise issues which, for whatever reason, have slipped through the net and not been dealt with through other channels – we continually monitor reviews and address any negative feedback directly with the customer. It can also inform the development of our customer experience if we see recurrent areas for improvement identified by customers – this recently contributed to us changing one of our carriers.

"Of equal importance, review sites provide reassurance to prospective customers who may not know anything about Feelunique. Strong ratings on review sites is part of our overall brand equity and crucial to our future growth.

"On a personal level, as COO, I spend time most days dipping into one or more of the review sites to see recent reviews. It helps me keep close to what our customers think about us."

Current Feelunique Trustpilot rating — 9.0 (May 2017, based on 6,676 reviews)

THE STAGES OF REVIEW COLLECTION

Just about every stage of the online retail experience can inform a customer review and there are a good number of stages too. Each one can tell you something important – whether that's about your product selection, delivery performance, customer service or post-purchase care. These reviews may help you to identify common themes and issues that require remedy.

This section considers some of the main stages of the experience that may inspire feedback from your customers – and how you might go about interpreting and using them.

Product reviews

"I love this camera, but the lens lets it down a bit."

The customer's impression and experience of the product they bought will tell you, above all, the perceived quality of that product.

Note that, if it's negative in tone, often the issue may be that the product doesn't live up to *expectation* – it may not be that it is a poor product as such, but how it was marketed didn't correlate with its reality. Potential areas to review include the product description, photograph, videos or other ways the product may be misrepresented on the site that is frustrating people.

Product reviews can also give you an indication of how to build product associations. If you find that customers generally like a product, except for one aspect, you can respond accordingly. For example, if you have reviews for a DSLR camera along the lines of *'Great camera, but the lens could be better'*, perhaps you should include another lens in a product bundle.

Post-purchase

"Took me ages to find the thing I was looking for."

A review of the post-purchase experience can offer a view of the on-site experience. At this stage, the reviewer has made a purchase but not yet received it. Uncoloured by impressions of a newly-arrived product, this is their impression of the site and the process of purchase.

It's a specific time to gain feedback that may be among the most revealing in terms of where the friction points are on the path to purchase, and what a customer would like to see changed about the checkout process or site experience as a whole.

Post-receipt of goods

"I only ordered a USB stick. Did it really need such a huge box?"

The arrival of the product can really make or break the overall experience for customers.

This is where you can find out about your standards of packaging, and the overall degree of customer satisfaction around delivery. Your customer may be frustrated at the amount of packaging that was used to deliver a relatively small item, and this can be amplified if it means that a purchase that should have fitted through the letterbox becomes a failed delivery.

Similarly, a surly driver can sour the experience and damage your brand, even if the delivery was performed by a third-party provider.

More than just a star rating — recency and volume

Respondents to a survey said the most important factor in reviews was:

• how recently the reviews were posted (20%)

• the number of reviews posted (20%)

Source — Trustpilot, How consumers use reviews today

Customer service

"The dress was the wrong colour. I called customer service and they sent me the right one straight away. They were incredibly helpful."

Good customer service can prevent the loss of a potential repeat customer – and turn a negative experience into a positive one – and in extreme cases salvage potential damage to your brand.

This specific feedback can indicate much more than your own general impression of how good you are at customer service. It shows whether or not you resolved an issue, how well you did, and how the customer feels about your brand afterwards. The feedback also provides a clear indication of exactly how the respondent would have preferred the interaction to go and will provide a blueprint for improvement.

Post-return / post-refund

"The bag turned out to be a bit different from what I wanted. But it was easy to send it back and swap it for a different one."

Does the shopper consider the return of the product / refund of their money as the conclusion of your business together – does the sentiment suggest that's their last engagement with you or would they likely buy from you again? Is this just a product they didn't like, even though they remain very fond of your offering and your brand more generally? If the customer was wavering on the issue of whether to shop again, did the return process drive them away or save the day? Reviews in this area can help provide clarity around these questions.

Device

"The add-to-basket function was really clunky on my mobile."

A huge number of online shoppers use multiple devices on their path to purchase. Ideally, the customer experience across all channels would be seamless, and of consistently high quality. But reviews can tell you if that's not the case – perhaps the smartphone experience is not matching the quality of experience compared to a tablet or desktop.

Major sales periods

"The site is really slow to load."

The date on which the customer wrote their review could have some influence on the content or tone of their review. For example, supposing the review came on a day like Black Friday, would the enormous sales event affect the sentiment? The customer may expect less – things like customer service may be less on their mind when huge savings take prominence. Or perhaps they expect more. The havoc of the day may inspire a greater need for customer service.

Christmas is an especially sensitive period for shopping. The pressure to get gifts in time leaves shoppers particularly intolerant to delays in delivery or difficulties in completing their purchase. This can amplify their criticism in reviews.

The percentage of negative reviews increases in the lead-up to Christmas peak trading and doesn't return to normal levels until January (figure 3).
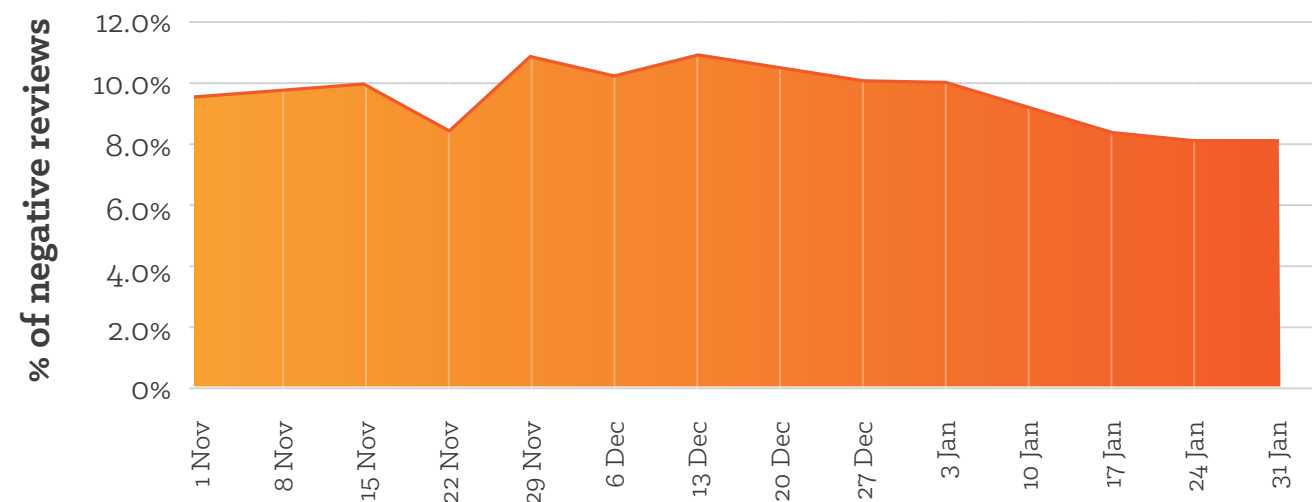

Figure 3 – Percentage of negative reviews on Trustpilot site (Nov '16 - Jan '17)

Anna Domanskiy, digital operations manager, Staples Europe:

"We find reviews are very important as we've seen a massive shift in customer behaviour. The customer of today has many resources to find information on companies before they decide where to purchase. Our Trustpilot reviews play a critical role when customers are deciding where to buy office supplies so we ensure the reviews are visible throughout the purchase funnel."

TIME TO REVIEW THE REVIEWS

Gathering reviews is not simply about accumulating a good star rating. Of course, high-star reviews demonstrate a certain reputation, service and quality and play a huge role in attracting and converting new customers. However, reviews have proven to be useful in other ways too.

An aggregation of feedback from customers at various stages of engagement can clarify exactly where you need to improve the experience, so that you can retain their custom. Just as positive feedback can attract customers, negative reviews can help you keep them – if properly acted upon.

Customer-driven information can be gold dust. Hearing directly from shoppers about exactly what frustrates or inconveniences them can lead to much more immediate and precise improvements than wading through swathes of hard data.

In order to properly optimise your website and business performance using customer feedback, it's important to consistently organise and process the feedback. The business needs to review the reviews, so to speak, on an ongoing basis.

ABOUT IMRG

For over 20 years, IMRG (Interactive Media in Retail Group) has been the voice of e-retail in the UK. We are a membership community comprising businesses of all sizes – multichannel and pureplay, SME and multinational, and solution providers to industry.

We support our members through a range of activities – including market tracking and insight, benchmarking and best practice sharing. Our indexes provide in-depth intelligence on online sales, mobile sales, delivery trends and over 40 additional KPIs.

Our goal is to ensure our members have the information and resources they need to succeed in rapidly-evolving markets – both domestically and internationally.

For more information please visit
www.imrg.org

ABOUT TRUSTPILOT

Trustpilot is a global online review community that builds trust and transparency between consumers and businesses. By empowering businesses with a platform to directly engage with their customers, we have set new global standards in the value of trust. With 160,000 businesses reviewed on Trustpilot and over 72 million visitors a year, we have become the global consumer community powering trust and business insight through genuine and authentic feedback.

Trustpilot has created a global consumer community that spans over 65 countries, driving businesses to continuously improve operations, increase customer satisfaction, and further innovation. By connecting consumers and businesses, we have turned trust and reputation into a business priority that serves the consumer.

For more information please visit
www.business.trustpilot.com

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