THE
ULTIMATE
TECH MARKETER'S
GUIDE TO USER REVIEWS
2019

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This e-book will walk you through why you need peer reviews and user-generated content, how to get it, and how to use it to maximize your 2019 revenue.

IT Central Station
Unbiased reviews from the tech community

CONTENTS

WHY PEER TO PEER CONTENT IS KING FOR ENTERPRISE TECHNOLOGY MARKETING

Prior to making a purchase, potential buyers look to sources other than the company website or sales rep to get their product information. This is why peer reviews are the major source of information for most consumers today. Peer reviews enable buyers to get a firsthand view of how a product works, its level of quality, and the various features or components being offered — before committing to buying the product.

Why Peer Reviews Resonate with Enterprise Technology Professionals

According to Forrester, 74% of B2B buyers are doing more than 50% of their purchasing research online. A recent study done by Gartner also revealed that 68% of a customer's buying time is spent away from the actual vendor.

The Gartner research was conducted with enterprise buyers, and indicates that while the peer review trend may have started in the B2C sector, this reality is now just as relevant for B2B companies, and enterprise buyers are regularly using peer reviews as their major purchasing influencer.

Consumers see peer reviews as their filter between what the companies want you to believe and what's accurate about the products or services being sold. This is particularly true for the technology sector, where services or products can easily be hyped up, and competitors and their solutions trashed- known in the industry as vendor FUD.

Vendor generated materials often neglect the buyer's need for an accountable assessment of features such as speed, integration, and functionality, each of which can only be accurately evaluated through long-term use, and not always even always with a trial or POC.

Peer reviews help bridge this gap, providing the detailed information that potential users are looking for in the buying process.
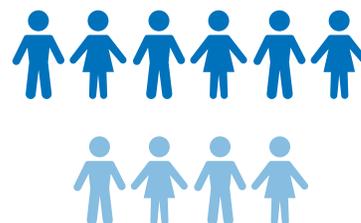
60%
of **B2B TECH BUYERS** read reviews **BEFORE** making a purchase.

HOW TO GET YOUR USERS TO WRITE AWESOME REVIEWS FOR YOU

As the leading review platform for B2B enterprise technology reviews, we understand the importance of user reviews in the B2B space. Both our own research and research from the industry's leading technology analysts assert the importance of user generated content.

> **We're now seeing a shift in the Customer First Revolution for business buyers who prefer B2B channels such as LinkedIn and IT Central Station.**
>
> Jeb Dasteel
> Senior Vice President and Chief
> Customer Officer at Oracle

According to the Salesforce blog, "word-of-mouth recommendations from peers influence over 90% of all B2B buying decisions."

But do buyers really trust the peer content that they read online? The numbers speak for themselves: 88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as they trust personal recommendations.

How can technology vendors bridge this gap and provide potential buyers with B2B reviews that not only answer their questions of "Is this solution right for my company's needs?", but also answer questions such as, "Why is this solution the best option among its competitors?"

The Challenges of Collecting Authentic and Helpful User Reviews

Collecting real reviews for potential buyers can present some challenges. Not all users are willing to write a review, and dealing with internal compliance regulations can make the process difficult.

One of the big advantages of external review sites is that users can give feedback about your solutions without having to comply with company policy. This means that it is both easier to find users who are willing to share details of their experiences, and they will be more honest and open than if they were providing a corporate case study.

What Information Should Your User Reviews Include?

Another challenge, once you've found users willing to give reviews, is knowing which questions potential buyers want answered.

For example: Are readers most interested in your pricing model? Do they expect full disclosure of your technical support offering? Are scalability and stability the primary 'must-haves' on their checklist?

HOW TO COLLECT QUALITY CUSTOMER REVIEWS

(1) Where to Find Users

At Your Conferences or User Events

By approaching users at your conferences or at events for reviews, you are targeting a large group of knowledgeable users in one location, who will have valuable feedback to share. You can also record their feedback face-to-face, rather than rely on email or phone feedback, which can be more time consuming for your users.

Via Customer Advocacy Programs

By tapping into your customer advocacy programs, you can connect with users who are not only experienced with your solution but also willing to share their feedback with others.

Via Your Support Team

Customers who have had positive interactions with your support team are a great source of feedback, and user reviews. Once technical issues have been resolved they can provide reviews that discuss room for improvement, as well as your technical support.

Identify Your Brand Evangelists Online

Monitor your brand online with tools like Google Alerts and Buzzsumo. Not only can it help you understand if your users are dissatisfied, but it can also help you identify users who love your solution and who you can potentially reach out to for user reviews.

What additional features would you recommend for the future releases?

2 What to Include in Your B2B User Questionnaires

ASK USERS what they find valuable about your solution. Their answers may surprise you and can provide invaluable information for your product team.

Example: When asked *"What do you find valuable in IBM Spectrum Protect?",* CTO Carsten Dan Petersen writes:

"The smallest entry level sized installation can easily grow to large enterprise usages and be migrated across platforms. The product is very client-oriented which supports a lot of different platforms and products, and only have to be upgraded approx. every five years to maintain support."

ASK USERS which solutions they have also evaluated. This information can give you great competitive information, and can also influence the potential buyers reading your user reviews.

Example: When asked *"Did you consider any other solutions besides VMware vSAN?"*, an Infrastructure Manager answers:
"We looked briefly at alternatives, but nothing stood out like vSAN. Nutanix was another solution, but surprisingly, it would have cost us more.."

ASK USERS how and where you can improve your solution. Not only is this information very valuable for your product team, it also makes your reviews more believable. Users don't trust five-star reviews that only say good things about a product.

Example: When asked *"Where do you see room for improvement in Tableau?"* Data Analysis Team Leader Yali Pollak answers:

"Tableau lacks machine learning algorithms that you can implement using R, SPSS Modeler, and Python.It has clustering and time-series forecasting abilities which are helpful, but adding machine learning capabilities like decision trees, CHAID analysis and K-means would make this product perfect!"

Some users may be happy to give feedback, but can't because of their own corporate compliance policies. One way around this is to allow users to give reviews either with their full details or anonymously. By giving users this choice you will collect a wider range of user feedback and review materials.

Now that you've got quality, authentic user reviews, how can you maximize this content to bring in the highest ROI to your company?

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FOUR DEPARTMENTS IN YOUR COMPANY THAT CAN USE YOUR REVIEW CONTENT TO INCREASE YOUR REVENUE

Your SDR Team

In-depth user reviews can be a great tool for your SDR team. We frequently hear from our own SDR team about their struggles to grab the attention of potential buyers.

Traditionally SDR teams use top-of-the-funnel marketing materials to demonstrate why it's worth getting on the phone. As we've noted, user reviews are more compelling than nearly all other forms of top-of-the-funnel content, including white papers and analyst reports.

Your Sales Team

Your sales team loves marketing materials that demonstrate the value of your solution for users, especially when it differentiates you from your competition. Yet when marketing materials don't reflect the values potential users care about, your lead generation efforts are in danger of producing a low number of B.A.N.T qualified leads. User reviews provide evidence of where your solutions stand out vis-a-vis your competitors, helping your sales team to make a compelling case and bring in more revenue.

Your Customer Advocacy Team

Customer Advocacy teams gather user feedback for marketing and sales, but each case study can generate hundreds of work hours. Finding users willing to display their identities and be an evangelist for your company is certainly no easy task, and compliance, both internally and from your user's company, adds its own set of issues. Positive user reviews, gathered by an external source allows users to be more honest than in a case study, and questions aren't limited by internal protocols and regulations.

Your Lead Generation Team

Your lead generation team wants to create gated content that resonates with your potential users. User reviews discussing both the pros and cons of your solution can be the key to bringing in more leads. While a white paper may generate interest, and a case study will be even more powerful, user-generated content brings the highest returns. Retargeting to user content consistently has a higher click-through rate than vendor-generated content, leading to more leads, and more engaged prospects.

USER REVIEWS AS A KEY FOR OPTIMIZING YOUR SEARCH RANKINGS

Not only are user reviews a brand awareness and marketing tool, user reviews can also maximize your SEO rankings and get more eyes on your product.

The SEO Success Factor:
Just ask VMware vSAN

When "hyper-converged infrastructure reviews" is typed into Google, VMware vSAN's blog post, entitled "Advice from Real Users Who Have Transitioned to Hyper-Converged Infrastructure" is the second result out of 698,000.

How did VMware vSAN succeed in being Google's #1 search result for those looking for "hyper-converged infrastructure reviews"? On IT Central Station's website alone, the Hyper-Converged Infrastructure category has over 25 different vendor solutions. In other words, the competition is fierce.
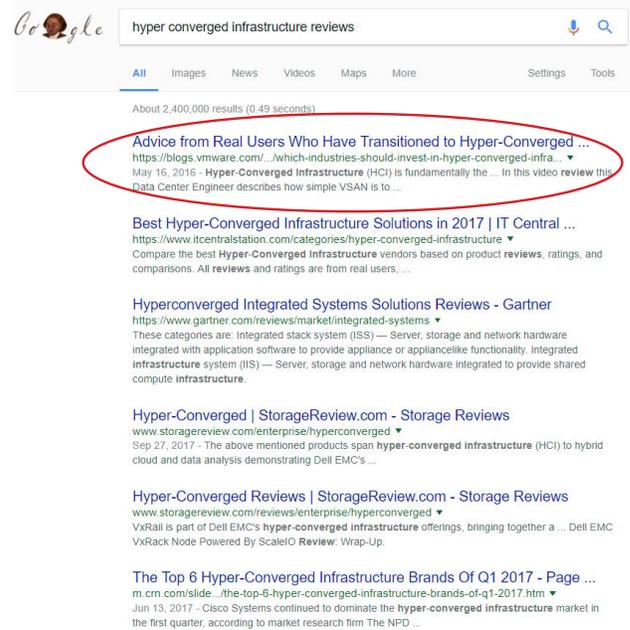
The Real Answer:
User-Generated Content

VMware vSAN leveraged their user reviews in a non-biased, informative and helpful manner. Because these reviews are written by real users who have experience with the solution and can speak of their experiences using the same terminology that consumers are searching for.

Integrating User Reviews
Into Your SEO Strategy

Not only does user review content make it easier for potential users to find the information they're looking for about your solution, user reviews give potential users the type of information they want. Going back to our initial example, when enterprise tech professionals embark on reading hyper-converged infrastructure reviews, VMware vSAN's user-generated review content is a go-to search result for Google to provide as a response.

When it comes to decision-making, the more pointed, relevant, and useful information your existing users provide, the easier it is for potential users to have their questions answered about which enterprise technology is the best fit for their company's needs.

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Within a month of working with IT Central Station, including sponsorship of the comparison page, we saw a **24% increase in organic traffic** to our site.

Patrick Bates
Director of Marketing at
Windward Studios

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CLICK TO WATCH
Cameron Van Orman (SVP Product Marketing at CA Technologies) speaking about the value he sees in working with IT Central Station.

Cameron Van Orman
Senior Vice President Product Marketing
CA Technologies

HOW TO LEVERAGE NEGATIVE USER REVIEWS TO INCREASE YOUR ROI

At least 60% of technology software shoppers turn to product reviews for information during the buying process, which is why peer-based product reviews are so essential to a company's success. What many marketing managers don't realize is:

It's not that only positive reviews bring traffic; negative reviews can also boost your ROI.

In a recent study by the Journal of Consumer Research, negative feedback that is worded the right way leads to increased higher conversion rates. Of course, this doesn't mean that you should start scrambling for angry customers and poor reviews. As you can imagine — it's not as simple as that!

So, how can you leverage negative user reviews into ROI?

Here are three lessons for enterprise-level technology marketers to leverage negative reviews not only for boosting their customer feedback, but also for increasing conversions.

LESSON #1

Learn from the Experts - Your Users

While nobody enjoys criticism, intelligent companies view criticism at face value: an honest and authentic appraisal of how their product is performing. Negative reviews give your product team invaluable insight into what you are doing right and into what you're doing wrong — from the most influential and pertinent source of all: your users.

Businesses in today's tech industry need to utilize agile marketing techniques for constant improvement of their products. In the technology sector, if you aren't advancing, you are undergoing a speedy demise of outdatedness.

Because negative reviews are generated specifically by your niche audience, these reviews not only help your company by highlighting the areas that need improvement, but they provide the most relevant and useful form of feedback.

Utilizing these insights will help you to:
• Tailor your product to the changing demands of the public
• Hone in on the shortcomings
• Craft an applicable plan for improvement.

LESSON #2

Seize the Opportunity for Communication

Any comment made by a customer, even if it's negative, opens a line of communication between you and your audience. This is a golden opportunity for you to score positive PR points, as well as customer insight.

By responding directly to negative feedback, you show customers that your company is listening to their concerns. Contrarily, ignoring feedback of any sort can portray your business as one that that doesn't value its customers.

Market research has shown that customers who were responded to 'correctly' after a negative experience were much more likely to recommend that business to friends later on.

'Correct' Responses to Negative Feedback include:
• Validating the complaint
• Asking questions for clarification
• Apologizing (but without giving excuses or being defensive)
• Offering solutions
• (Always) thanking the customer for their time
• An interaction that follows the above guidelines will generate positive feelings on the part of the customer as well as create a great image for potential customers in the future.

LESSON #3

Foster Authenticity

When looking to authenticate a brand, consumers look out for the negative comments that supplement the positive ones. When a potential buyer sees a company that boasts hundreds of positive reviews without a single negative comment, they automatically assume the feedback is fictitious. Why? Because no one product offering is flawless, and negative feedback indicates that companies are sincere in their efforts to honor their users' perspective and improve their product offering.

Seeing negative feedback on a website gives customers the impression that your company is an honest one. After all, you have the ability to reject or delete negative comments. By leaving up these less-than-flattering reviews, you show your potential buyers that you are prepared to deal honestly, even if there is a little discomfort on your part in doing so.

> "
> **IT Central Station's reviews programs are an extension of our marketing efforts.**
>
> Cameron Van Orman
> SVP Product Marketing
> at CA Technologies
> "

CONCLUSION

In this e-book, we have delved into the different ways user-generated content can increase your company's growth. We've identified why and how peer reviews offer the authentic user voice in an ever-crowded enterprise technology space, and showed you how different teams can leverage this content to increase performance.

Instead of sitting by passively when your users seek out alternatives, B2B Enterprise marketers have a unique opportunity to harness this content to influence your users in their buying journey.

ABOUT IT CENTRAL STATION

User reviews, candid discussions, and more for enterprise technology professionals.

The Internet has completely changed the way we make buying decisions. We now use ratings and review sites to see what other real users think before we buy electronics, book a hotel, visit a doctor or choose a restaurant. But in the world of enterprise technology, most of the information online and in your inbox comes from vendors but what you really want is objective information from other users. IT Central Station provides technology professionals with a community platform to share information about enterprise solutions.

IT Central Station is committed to offering user-contributed information that is valuable, objective and relevant. We validate all reviewers with a triple authentication process, and protect your privacy by providing an environment where you can post anonymously and freely express your views. As a result, the community becomes a valuable resource, ensuring you get access to the right information and connect to the right people, whenever you need it.

For more information, contact vendors@itcentralstation.com
www.itcentralstation.com