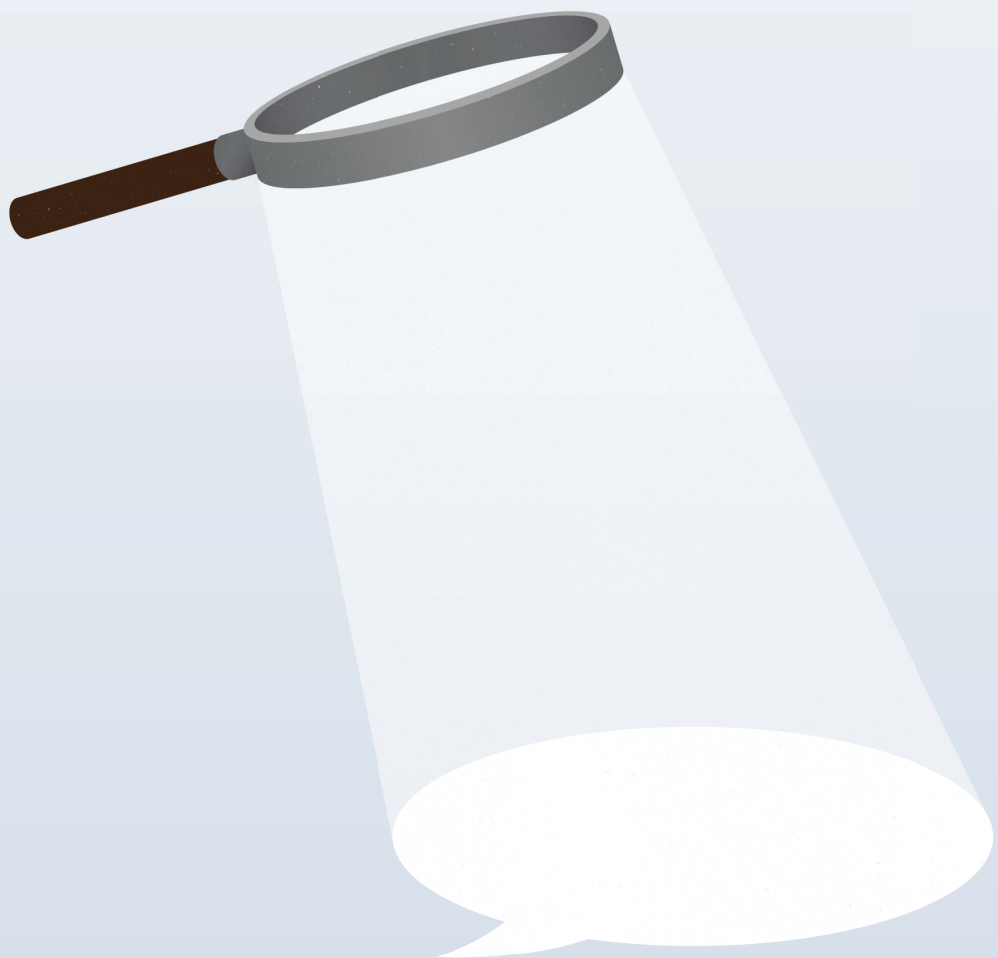


# Social content and SEO

How online businesses can  
build traffic and conversions  
with user generated content



# Introduction

## First step to purchase

The vast majority of online purchases start with consumers typing a query into a search engine. Online businesses need to do everything they can to ensure these would-be purchasers see and click on their pages first, rather than pages on competitor sites offering similar or identical products.

There are a range of ways to ensure your pages stand out in search results, that are collectively known as 'Search Engine Optimisation' or SEO.

This ebook is an introduction to one of the most powerful SEO tools available: user generated content (UGC). Displaying user reviews, ratings and Q&As on your site (in the right ways) increases search engine performance for every one of your web pages. That means more search traffic reaching your site - up to a third more - and more conversions once it's there.

The stakes have never been higher for SEO success. Read on to find out how a smart use of UGC enables you to get ahead of the competition and stay there.

# What is SEO?

SEO is often presented as a complicated art, and it's true that there are many, frequently-changing factors that affect where a page will appear in search engine results.

However, there are two basic SEO principles that always hold true, and make a critical difference to traffic and conversion rates:

- 1 **Search engines value web pages that contain fresh, relevant, original, high-quality content.**
- 2 **Pages rank more highly when they contain the same words and phrases that buyers tend to type into search engines.**

It sounds simple in principle, but when you're operating a large ecommerce site, creating unique, high-quality, up-to-date content to populate every page can seem an impossible task.

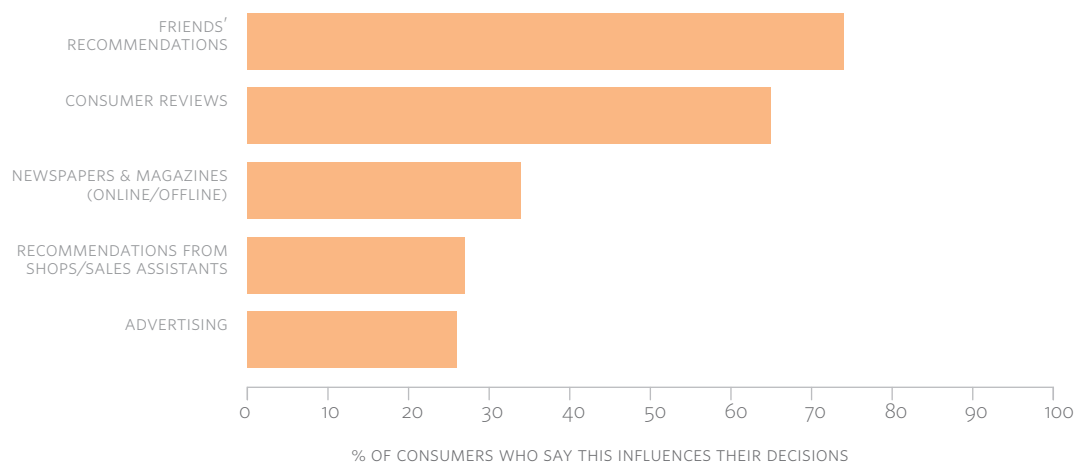
The problem isn't knowing what to write, it's scaling that content across thousands of pages. A good ecommerce team can write about the products they sell, but writing enough content to cover a huge inventory - and regularly updating that content to make sure it stays fresh - is incredibly time-consuming and expensive.

There is a much more effective and affordable way to ensure the content on each page is fresh, original, useful and highly attractive to search engines. It's sourcing user reviews, ratings and advice for every product - and publishing that content on the relevant category or product page.

# Why user generated content is so important

As the internet gets ever more social, we increasingly look to peers, friends and even strangers for their opinions on everything we do. People trust the views of other people more than they trust marketing messages, so social content has a major influence on what people buy.

## IMPORTANT INFLUENCES ON PURCHASE DECISIONS\*



Facebook status updates, tweets and blog posts are all social content, but they're not the only kind. Other types of content, like user reviews, ratings and conversations, are more useful for online businesses, because of their powerful impact on consumers' online buying decisions.

### REVIEWS

Opinions on a given product or service, ideally written by authentic, verified users of that product or service.

### RATINGS

Marks out of ten, number of stars out of five, or any kind of rating system that makes it easy for users to indicate their opinion of a product or service.

### CONVERSATIONS

On-page Q&A sections where customers and potential buyers can seek each other's opinions and advice on a given product or category.

## Including user generated content on product and category pages boosts traffic and sales in five key ways:

### **SEARCH RANKINGS IMPROVE**

Search rankings improve because reviews increase the amount of original, fresh and relevant content on a webpage, and because pages with reviews rank higher for the kind of keywords that customers type into search engines.

### **SEARCH RESULTS STAND OUT MORE**

Search results stand out more because properly-formatted reviews can provide eye-catching 'snippets' of information or star ratings that search engines can display on their results pages.

### **TIME SPENT ON YOUR SITE INCREASES**

Time spent on your site increases because customers find it a valuable source of information and advice. This is increasingly important, as some search engines now measure time spent on a site as evidence of its quality and relevance, rewarding it with more favourable ranking.

### **RETURN VISITS INCREASE**

Return visits increase as customers come to trust your site as a good place to research potential new purchases (which increases conversions too). When loyal repeat customers come directly to your site, you don't have to rely so heavily on search engine traffic.

### **CUSTOMER TRUST GROWS**

Customer trust grows because genuine opinions from other customers boost confidence in your products, leading to a higher conversion rate from search traffic.

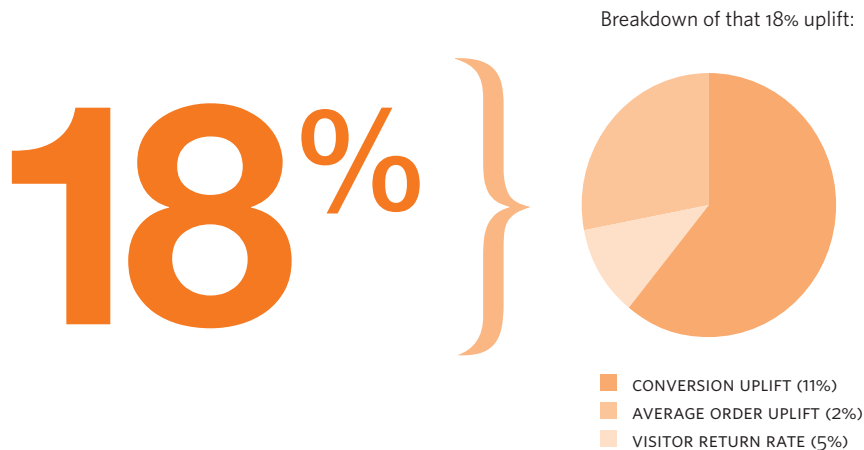
# Conversions

Increasing traffic to individual product and category pages is only the first half of the equation. The other advantage of user generated content is that it also turns those extra visitors into paying customers.

Lots of independent studies have shown just how much conversion rates improve when ecommerce sites include user reviews, ratings and conversations on their product pages. Our own data backs this up - and shows that user generated content increases more than just conversion rates.

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## SALES UPLIFT FROM REVIEWS\*



# The importance of authenticity

User generated content will only have a positive impact on sales if consumers trust what they read. Online consumers are savvy creatures, and can easily spot fake, manipulated or unauthentic social content.

There are several steps you can take to ensure and maintain authenticity:

- 1 ONLY PUBLISH GENUINE REVIEWS FROM VERIFIED CUSTOMERS**  
Don't be tempted to have employees write glowing reviews for your products or services (or post bad reviews on competitor sites). It may seem like a good idea, but being found out can destroy your reputation.
- 2 PUBLISH BAD REVIEWS TOO**  
Publish the good with the bad – customers will be more confident purchasing from you if they can view a range of genuine opinions, and will trust your positive reviews more. It also shows you can take criticism on board and address it if needed.
- 3 EXPLAIN YOUR REVIEW POLICY**  
Clearly explain your review policy and any moderation activities. The more customers understand how your reviews work, the better they will be able to decide whether or not to trust them.
- 4 LEARN FROM REVIEWS**  
If a product or service receives consistently negative reviews, don't ignore it – listen and respond before you start losing money. Customers will reward you for acknowledging and fixing problems.
- 5 USE A TRUSTED THIRD PARTY**  
Use a respected third party to manage your reviews. Independently collected reviews are trusted almost three times as much as self-collected reviews – and that additional trust leads to extra conversions.

**So how can you ensure you get the most value from authentic, user generated content on your website?**

# Key SEO considerations

To get the best results from the user generated reviews, ratings and Q&As on your site, there are four key SEO considerations to bear in mind:

## 1 INDEXATION

Search engines need to understand the review content. This means ensuring that it appears in text form in the HTML. You should avoid using JavaScript, Flash, images, iFrames or other technologies that hide your review content from search engines, preventing it from improving your rankings.

## 2 NON-DUPLICATION

Search engines value unique content, so a review should ideally appear on only one page of your site, at one URL. Snippets of the same content can appear in multiple places (eg. category and product pages), but you should ensure that the full review is only shown on one page.

If you simply must show the same reviews in more than one place, publish them in the most important location in text form, in the HTML. Then use the kind of technology that hides reviews from search engines' eyes (see above) in all the other locations.

## 3 DEPTH AND COVERAGE

Improving the ranking of one page can help the ranking of your entire site – as well as increasing traffic to that individual page. So make sure unique, relevant user generated content appears on as many of your website pages as possible. The single most important part of any plan to gather reviews is to ensure that they cover as many of your services or products as possible.

## 4 FRESHNESS

Search engines increasingly prefer pages with up-to-date content. Continually sourcing new reviews and customer Q&As is a great way of keeping product pages regularly refreshed. It has a positive effect on sales too: research shows that the more reviews a product has, the better it sells.

### CONVERSION RATE INCREASE\*



\* Reevo Insight research 2010

# Making key pages richer and more valuable

We've covered the basics of why user generated content is important, but there are other ways in which that content can be made to deliver even more value. Two important ones are targeting long-tail keyphrases and taking advantage of snippets.

## Long-tail keyphrases

When you're in competition with a lot of other sites offering similar (or identical) products and services, it's a major challenge to ensure the content on every product page is different from the same products on other sites. Relying on manufacturer descriptions or excerpts from expert reviews won't provide you with the unique content you need - everyone's using that trick now.

The more individual reviews you have for each product, the more unique content you will generate. There's a direct and proven correlation between the number of reviews on a page, the amount of search traffic that page generates, and the proportion of those visitors who convert into sales.

### **TRAFFIC INCREASES**

The more reviews the page has, the more relevant it is for a wider range of keywords, and the higher it will rank for searches that use any of those keywords. Generating a lot of reviews lets you target a wider range of keywords, attracting the 'long tail' of visitors who use less common keywords and phrases in their searches.

Incorporating user Q&As on product pages is especially helpful with long-tail targeting, as many buyers start their search for a product by typing a question into a search engine. Having users post and answer the same kinds of question on your product pages will help those pages to rank more highly for the kind of questions that potential buyers are asking.

### **CONVERSIONS INCREASE**

'Long-tail' searchers often use unusual keyphrases because they're looking for something very specific - which means they're already pretty sure about what they want. That's why long-tail traffic often has a much higher conversion rate.

And, of course, the more reviews a product has, the more those opinions will be trusted by potential buyers. Again, studies show that a product with many reviews sells better than a product with only a few.

## Snippets

Snippets are small pieces of user generated content from product pages that search engines publish as part of a result to help users decide which link to click on. A typical example is the product's average star rating, which some search engines display alongside the search result text.

Studies show that snippets increase click-through rates by 10-20%, delivering a big traffic increase over results without snippets.

[Acer Aspire 5749 review | from TechRadar's expert reviews of ...](#)  
[www.techradar.com/reviews/pc-mac/laptops...pcs/.../acer.../review](http://www.techradar.com/reviews/pc-mac/laptops...pcs/.../acer.../review) [+1]  
4 Dec 2011 – **Acer Aspire 5749 Expert Review: Advanced features in a budget package - Buying advice from the leading technology site.**

*Search result without snippet*

[Acer Aspire 5749 review | from TechRadar's expert reviews of ...](#)  
[www.techradar.com/reviews/pc-mac/laptops...pcs/.../acer.../review](http://www.techradar.com/reviews/pc-mac/laptops...pcs/.../acer.../review) [+1]  
★★★★★ Review by Jeff Parsons  
4 Dec 2011 – **Acer Aspire 5749 Expert Review: Advanced features in a budget package - Buying advice from the leading technology site.**

*Search result with snippet: increasing click-through rates by 10-20% \**

As with all user generated content, the key is to make sure ratings are formatted properly on each page so search engines can easily pick them up and repackage as a snippet.

# Improving search engine performance for your pages

Let's look at some examples of how the SEO performance of category and product pages can be improved with the inclusion of user generated content.

## CATEGORY PAGES

Businesses struggle to find ways to differentiate category pages, so they usually end up just being lists of products with no unique, rich content of their own.

There's nothing to help them rank higher in search results than similar category pages on other websites, so they don't deliver any kind of competitive advantage.

But when individual product pages are rich in user generated content, some of that content can be replicated on category pages too. Incorporating small extracts of ugc on category pages – like the average ratings illustrated below – not only differentiates them from competitor sites, but also provides useful information for browsers as soon as they arrive, leading to increased conversions.

The screenshot shows a product category page for digital cameras. On the left, there is a sidebar with filter options: Brand, Built in Microphone, Built in Screen, Built-In Flash Facility, Colour, Digital Zoom, Effective Pixels, Lens Focal Length, Lens Focal Length (35mm equivalence), Main Colour, Optical Zoom, and Screen Size. The main content area displays three camera products:

- Fujifilm FinePix AV100 12.2MP 3x Optical Zoom Digital Camera with 2.7 inch LCD Monitor (Black)**: In Stock, From: £44.50 inc VAT, 3.4 out of 10 reviews (1,337 reviews).
- Kodak EasyShare C143 Digital Camera 12MP 3x Optical Zoom with 2.7 inch LCD (Red)**: In Stock, From: £47.99 inc VAT, 3.2 out of 10 reviews (1,023 reviews).
- Kodak EasyShare C143 Digital Camera 12MP 3x Optical Zoom with 2.7 inch LCD (Silver)**: In Stock, From: £47.99 inc VAT.

Category page: with reviews

## PRODUCT PAGES

For sites with thousands of individual products, incorporating user reviews and opinions on every page is the easiest way to ensure each page is populated with rich, valuable, unique and regularly updated content.

Search engines interpret pages with plenty of social content as being more valuable for online searchers, rewarding them with higher rankings in results and increased traffic.

More importantly, the user reviews provide genuinely useful information to guide customers' buying decisions. Our research shows this typically increases sales by 18% over pages without social content.

# Conclusion

User generated content isn't just a nice-to-have – it's fast becoming the only way to ensure your product pages stand out in search engine results, attract search traffic and deliver the conversion rates you need.

Both search engines and customers want content that is fresh, relevant, trustworthy and authentic. Customer reviews and other user generated social content are an ideal way to achieve this balance.

If you're still unsure about the value of UGC for your business, just remember this: UGC is one of very few SEO tools that increase conversion rates at the same time traffic and rankings. And that's what it's all about.

**E:** [sales@reevoo.com](mailto:sales@reevoo.com)

**T:** +44 (0)20 7654 0350

**W:** [www.reevoo.com](http://www.reevoo.com)

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## ABOUT REEVOO

Reevoo is a world-leading provider of social commerce solutions. Our unique social commerce model has generated millions of reviews from confirmed customers in more than 18 countries.

We've developed market-leading services that are used by more than 150 major brands including Sony, Octopus Travel, Orange, Ford and Dixons. Working with Reevoo provides these brands with impartial social commerce content that produces an average sales uplift of 18%.

## FURTHER READING

*The New Social Purchase Journey*

How to inject social commerce content into every stage of the purchase journey to accelerate conversion.

[www.reevoo.com/b2b/social-purchase-journey](http://www.reevoo.com/b2b/social-purchase-journey)

*Bad Reviews Are Good For Business*

Businesses are scared of bad reviews, but they shouldn't be. Handle them right and they increase sales, improve loyalty and more.

[www.reevoo.com/b2b/bad-reviews](http://www.reevoo.com/b2b/bad-reviews)

*Beyond Facebook: Getting Active with Social Commerce*

Real success in the social era means looking beyond Facebook to engage consumers everywhere they're shopping – find out how.

[www.reevoo.com/b2b/beyond-facebook](http://www.reevoo.com/b2b/beyond-facebook)