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TO IMPROVE SALES AND BRAND IMAGE,

companies need to actively manage online reviews on platforms such as Amazon and Google

Customer feedback in terms of online reviews has become more and more important. Star ratings guide us to the best products on Amazon or to the best location on Google maps, and review texts give us valuable information for our buying decision. While reviews originate in the online world, their impact has reached the offline world as well. Reviews are used at every touch point along the customer journey and have changed our consumer behavior fundamentally. Online marketplaces such as Amazon are here to stay and play an important role even within the sporting goods industry today. But industry specific players such as REI or ChainReactionCycles also use reviews to promote products on their e-commerce websites. That is why sporting goods brands need to embrace this development and start to manage online reviews. A rating strategy is needed and a solid implementation key.

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Star ratings and review texts play a major role for algorithms and consumers alike. Most prominently on Amazon and Google, they influence which product or which store is shown in the search results list with details on subsequent pages on the relevant online platform. Product reviews influence the decision-making process along the entire customer journey and most people use reviews when comparing products before making the final buying decision. Various studies around the globe underline this fact.

The same way as online reviews guide us to a restaurant or influence our hotel booking behavior, they lead consumers to a particular store when using Google

Reviews have a clear impact on sales and brand image as they are a key factor for search engine algorithms and influence the consumer at every touch point along the customer journey.

Northwestern University's Spiegel Research Center found that
· Displaying reviews can increase conversion by 270%
· Reviews impact sales more for higher-priced items...
· ... and for higher-consideration items
· 5 stars is "too good to be true"

Rating Example of an online retailer

Maps or influence the buying decision when browsing on Amazon. There is no online vs. offline anymore. Reviews are not an online only attribute any longer but have a significant impact on any brand.

Online reviews need to be included in your reputation management

The need for companies to have a clear strategy and professional management for reviews & ratings is necessary due to the impact on a brand's image as well as online and offline sales. As part of their reputation management, companies need to look at what customers say about their stores and products in form of reviews and interact directly with them. What most companies already do on social media channels like Facebook must also be done on e-commerce channels like Amazon. One might say that the e-commerce platforms are even more important because that is the actual POS of today.

Market research and customer care at the digital POS

Companies need to look at two sides: the analysis of ratings and reviews and the customer care by responding to reviews.

Online reviews not only help consumers to make well-informed buying decisions but also give companies direct access to user feedback. This is still fairly new but should be positively embraced by brands. By analyzing both the quantitative side of ratings and the qualitative side of reviews invaluable insights can be gained. What do consumers like about your product, what do they not like? Do they have questions regarding the functionality and use of the product? Or regarding the material or the fabric? This kind of information can be found within the texts of online reviews and questions. Similarly, store reviews give insights into store cleanliness, stock availability or staff friendliness etc.

Especially in the sporting goods industry, product reviews can be used as an early warning system to detect quality issues, ranging from product defects to material problems. For sports equipment brands, such user feedback can

bring to light safety issues that pose risks to users. For sports fashion, reviews can highlight toxic materials etc. Any brand needs to know about such customer feedback, especially in the online world. And companies need to react to it as they do on social media
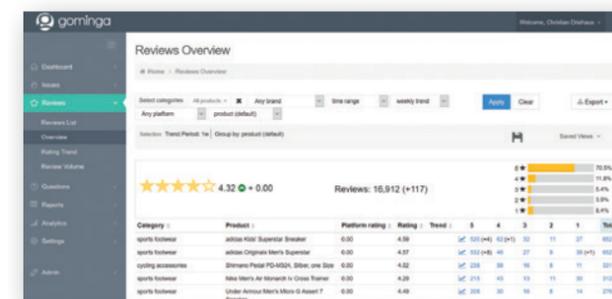
Furthermore, online reviews allow companies to interact directly with end consumers. Similar to social media channels such as Facebook, online reviews on Google or e-commerce websites such as Amazon can and should be used as another customer care channel. By responding to online reviews and replying to questions, brands show that they value the customer feedback. Online reputation management is extremely important and should not be limited to social media but include the digital POS as well.
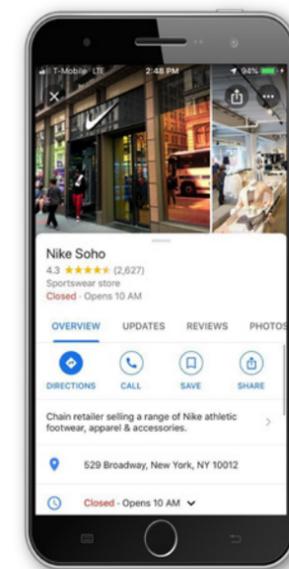
Google review example for online stores

For the offline world, location reviews on Google are a decisive factor for consumers to visit a certain store or not. When competition does not only come from other retailers or industry peers but from the broader "entertainment" spectrum, Google reviews can make or break a store visit. Why spend time at a shoe retailer when other users say its dirty and the staff is unfriendly? Better go to the movies. Since Google is the number 1 search engine almost everywhere and people have their smartphones at hand all the time, location reviews are of utmost importance and need to be managed professionally.

Monitoring, alerting, analysis and customer interaction – companies need to professionally manage their online product and store reviews.

gominga rating tool example