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 touchpoint 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.

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 product availability or staff friendliness etc. Especially in the sporting goods industry, product reviews can highlight toxic materials or 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.

**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 touchpoint along the customer journey.**

**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. 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 to 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 be positively embraced by brands. By analyzing both the quantitative side of ratings and the qualitative side of reviews, valuable insights can be gained. 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 to store cleanliness, stock availability or staff friendliness etc.

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.