



Rise of the Review Culture

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 **Trustpilot**

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Executive Summaries



Leveraging reviews to collect great consumer insights

In today's competitive world, businesses are starting to use customer feedback to stand out from the competition. And, as this report we've developed alongside Brightpearl will show, more shoppers than ever before are reading online reviews before buying, which means customer feedback might now be one of the best tools for marketers out there.

It has become essential to understand your consumers' needs and wants in order to ensure your company is future-proof. Listening empowers you to learn from, and talk to, your customers in order to build trust and create ever-improving experiences.

This report will make clear that today's consumer pays more attention to star ratings and online reviews when judging a brand or retailer. The Rise of the Review Culture means that businesses who actively collect insight through customer reviews are more likely to gain visibility into the

customer journey and better identify their needs and the areas of the business which need development, ultimately helping them to grow as a business.

Collecting consumer insights with reviews - including both the gaps and what is working well - can help companies map out an ideal customer journey which creates a better user experience for everyone, from awareness to purchase and advocacy.

In today's consumer era, it has become crucial for all businesses to prioritize customer-centricity, and use reviews both as a trust symbol and as a tool to engage with customers, and to continually improve and innovate. As our report will reveal, businesses that take the time to analyze their reviews and ratings and use them to guide strategic changes will be better off in the long run.

Alan Duncan, Senior Marketing Director, Trustpilot

Brightpearl.

Renewed operational investment: key to 5-star buying journeys

The retail game is changing in a big way and retailers must acknowledge that every customer who leaves feedback is now an influencer - and every potential buyer is ready to be influenced. This new study from Brightpearl and Trustpilot examines the impact of this emerging modern review culture to reveal whether retailers are losing their grip on negative online feedback - despite the growing financial and reputational stakes involved. It will also highlight the true cost of managing poor reviews for retail businesses.

The Rise of the Review Culture examines the importance of addressing and analyzing star ratings and online reviews as a way to better identify the touchpoints in the end-to-end buying journey that need development. The study will highlight the common pain points that lead to frustrated shoppers leaving 1-star ratings and will reveal the link

between below par operational performance and poor online feedback. It will reveal that renewed operational investment is a critical but underutilized strategy to help streamline and close the gaps after the buy button.

In addition, the report will explore why a focus on superior experiences at all ends of the buying journey - from outstanding user experiences and same-next day delivery options to real-time shipping and customer-focused returns models, are all essential elements needed to mitigate negative feedback, but also to delight customers.

Indeed, the Rise of the Review Culture makes clear that by actively working to delight customers at every interaction, retailers can earn the 5-star feedback needed to improve conversion, increase spend and enhance their reputation in order to truly stand apart from competitors.

Derek O'Carroll, CEO, Brightpearl

The emerging review culture

We now exist in a world where technological innovation is empowering customers to expect more from the brands they deal with, to switch when they're not happy or satisfied, and to share their negative experiences online.

As a result, today's online consumer is increasingly vocal and unforgiving - but also much more reliant on the feedback of other shoppers to support their decision making.

As a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2016 reveals: "Roughly eight-in-ten Americans (82%) say they consult online ratings and reviews when buying something for the first time," adding: "nearly half of Americans feel that customer reviews help 'a lot' to make consumers feel confident about their purchases."¹

In our survey, we found that a majority (95%) now read online reviews before buying, while 92% check star ratings.

¹ <https://www.retailtimes.co.uk/retailers-might-be-losing-sales-with-a-lack-of-ratings-and-customer-reviews-fresh-relevance-finds/>

95%

of all shoppers read online reviews before buying

92%

of shoppers check star ratings before making an online purchase

“We recognize that the decision to buy from Mad4Tools.com will be influenced, to a large degree, by our ratings and reviews.”

Paul Swain, Director, Mad4Tools.com



Online feedback can no longer be ignored

The voice of the shopper gets louder

Constructive feedback is always good, but with so many channels and outlets available to leave reviews, and star ratings gaining in popularity, the burgeoning culture of reviews is something that the online retailer now needs to keep in mind at all times.

Our survey shows that both star ratings and reviews are extremely important to shoppers, giving them a voice. The feedback is then picked up by people for whom this information will become the basis for their own buying decision.

Consumers use online reviews and star ratings more than ever

Star ratings and reviews are important to shoppers, giving them a voice and a compass to aid decision making.

95% of shoppers read online reviews before buying, with over two thirds of Americans (69%) stating that they do this often or always.

Meanwhile, star ratings are gaining in popularity, with 92% of respondents saying they are important to their buying decision. 63% of US shoppers often or always check star ratings before making an online purchase.

In addition, 55% of online consumers use rating filters to refine their choice of potential brands to buy from. On average, the minimum star rating consumers will accept when shopping online is 3.5.

More retailers need to engage in ratings and reviews

At the same time, however, our survey found that just 15% of US retail brands have a 5-star rating across popular online consumer review websites.

92%
of shoppers believe star ratings are important

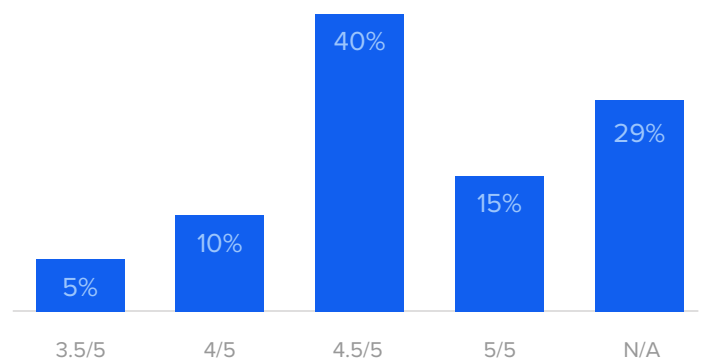
TrustScore **43,558 reviews**



Trustpilot (Oct 2018)

What is perhaps more surprising still is that more than a quarter (29%) of all retailers surveyed stated that they do not have a star rating online at all, despite its importance to consumers.

Proportion of retailers, average star rating



Poor reviews are becoming a bigger concern

Reviews and ratings are a part of the relationship

Almost half of shoppers in the US (48%) have posted a negative review after interacting with a retailer, and nearly three-quarters (73%) have done this in the last 12 months.

Furthermore, over three-quarters (79%) of shoppers say that it is 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' that they would leave a negative review following a bad experience.

This data highlights a growing willingness to share negative feedback online - a trend that brands must get a handle on. It means that retailers need to consider how they wish to manage this part of the relationship in a systematic way and on an ongoing basis. Almost 26% of consumers see responding to reviews as an important part of business activity.

Building meaningful relationships with your customers means actively participating in conversations and taking into consideration all of the feedback you're collecting, whether it's good or bad.

The impact of negative reviews on online retailers is growing

Negative reviews are having a discernible impact on merchants and brands. Around one in five (21%) of retailers admit that they have been affected by a poor online review in the past year. Meanwhile, 38% of retailers are worried about how this might impact them.

Furthermore, as customers are becoming more vocal than ever, perhaps due to the availability of online avenues for

customer feedback, and the ease and speed by which to share comments, over a quarter of retailers (29%) now see the situation as one that is worsening. It's something that retailers need to think seriously about as 43% admit that they do not know how to best deal with negative reviews.

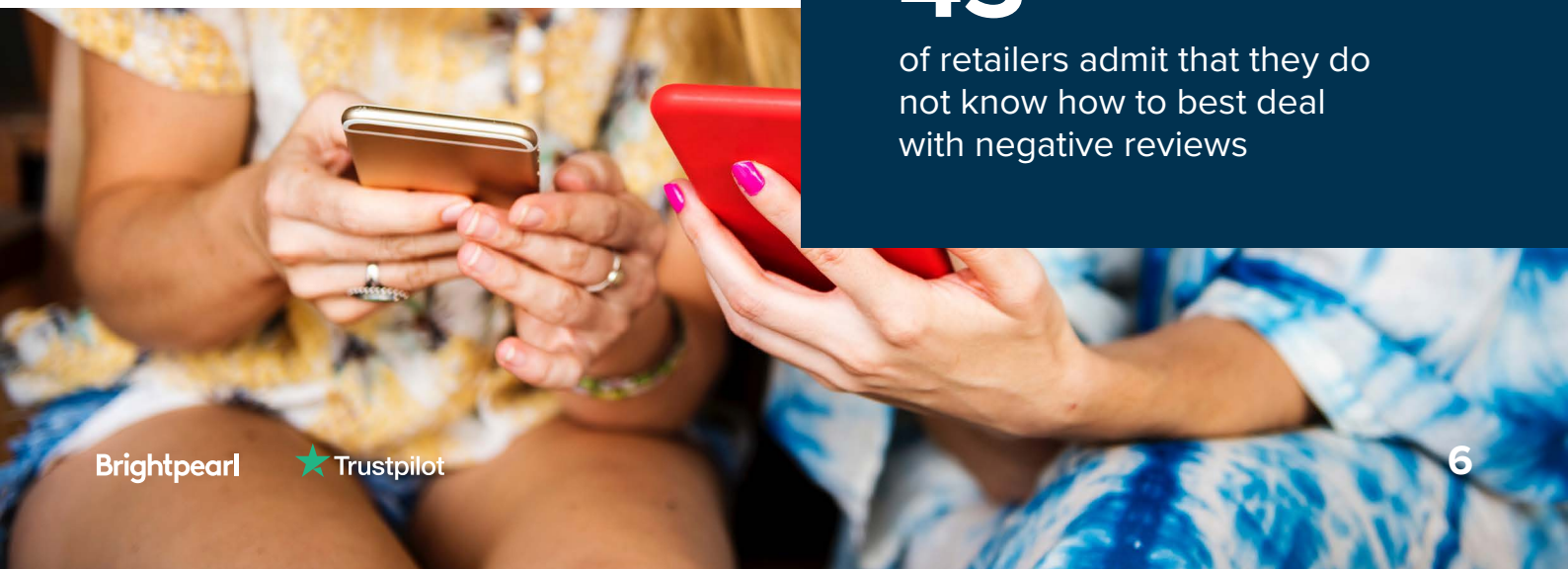
Over three-quarters of shoppers are likely to leave a negative review following a bad experience

29%

of retailers think that poor reviews are getting worse

43%

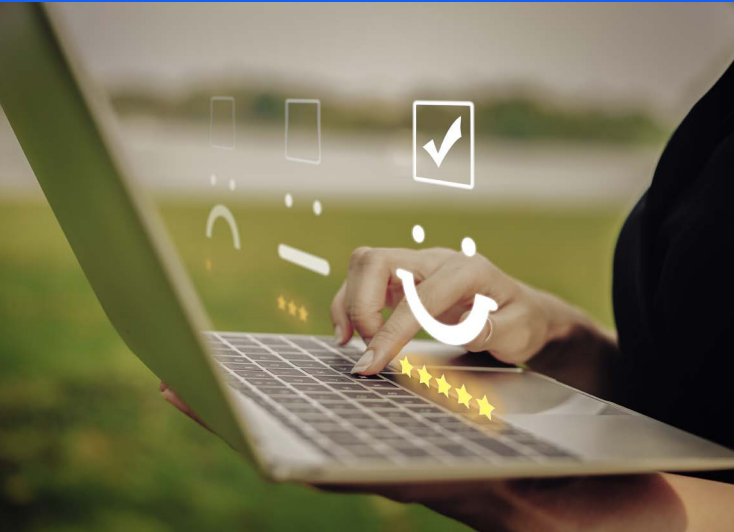
of retailers admit that they do not know how to best deal with negative reviews



Shoppers look to feedback to build trust

86%

of shoppers expect brands to respond to reviews



It's critical for retailers to engage with reviews

While retailers admit to struggling with how to best deal with negative reviews, at the very least, they will have to consider how to manage replying to reviews when the consumer view is taken into account. Just over three-quarters (86%) of shoppers expect the merchant to have responded to the reviews that they have received.

Responding to bad reviews is a great way to show new customers how much your business cares, and can also turn a bad customer experience into a positive one.

Indeed, 95% of unhappy customers will return if a business has resolved their issue quickly and efficiently.

In an online world and in the absence of live face-to-face interactions, American consumers are increasingly using reviews as a way of understanding whether a retailer is trustworthy or not.

Negative reviews have the biggest impact

Reviews and ratings have a direct impact on trust – and it's the negative reviews that are the most significant. Indeed, they can have a very rapid damaging effect. Our survey found that it only takes a handful - on average six - negative online reviews before a customer will decide to avoid buying from that merchant. However, 56% of shoppers have been put off from buying with a retail brand because of one single bad review - where the comment is particularly damning.

Conversely, consumers expect to see at least 35 positive reviews in order to trust a brand - that's six positive endorsements for every negative review.

To trust a retailer, shoppers expect to see at least 35 positive reviews.

It takes only 6 negative reviews before a shopper is put off buying from that retailer

Star ratings are the most important factor

Shoppers look to the stars when making a purchase decision

However, it is the star ratings that are seen as the most important factor for shoppers overall, with 68% stating that they pay attention to this when judging a brand or retailer.

Meanwhile, for comparison, over half (61%) of customers regard the quantity of reviews as an important guide, while 44% consider the recency of reviews.

68%

pay attention to star ratings when judging a brand or retailer

61%

look at the number of reviews a retailer has received

44%

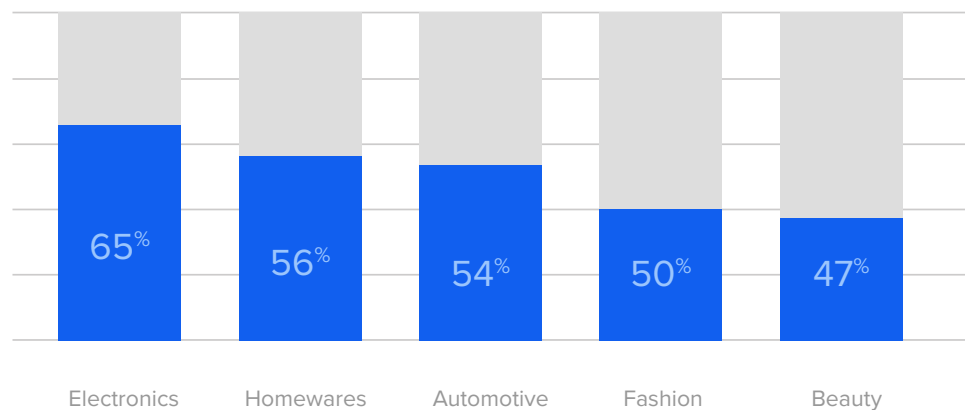
consider the recency of the reviews received

The cost of a negative review is higher for some than others

Shoppers of electronic goods are the most demanding with 65% of them expecting brands to achieve 4 or 5 stars before they will ever consider shopping with them. Next is automotive, where 56% of consumers expect this level of rating. Shoppers of beauty and fashion are the most tolerant, where we see the figure dropping to 50% and 47% respectively.

In some sectors, for example, fashion and beauty, leading social media influencers are beginning to play an increasingly supportive role in shoppers' buying decisions, alongside consumer review platforms. This may be a reason why they are more tolerant of lower star ratings across these sectors.

Proportion of US shoppers that expect a minimum of 4 stars or above to buy from a retailer, by vertical



Case Study

Review-led customer insights

How Planet of the Vapes uses customer reviews to support its ecommerce strategy

Retailer, Planet of the Vapes, has been selling online since 2008, with a focus on providing only quality products to their customers. This focus on customer satisfaction has helped them achieve an amazing 9.4/10 rating on Trustpilot from over 4,300 reviews.

Patrick Bissen is the CEO and founder of Planet of the Vapes; he says: “Trustpilot is a critical element of our ecommerce strategy. Trust and social proof are necessary to communicate to customers, get them over the buying line, and keep them coming back. Trustpilot gives us the tools to collect reviews, display them, and gain insights to improve our policies and procedures to better serve our customers.”

Why Trustpilot?

“We wanted to be on the same platform as our competitors to show users that we are more trusted and deliver a better buying experience than they do,” says Patrick. With Trustpilot, Planet of the Vapes can gather reviews, use them to find insights into how they can improve business, and feature the reviews using widgets on key pages to communicate that they’re a trusted retailer that real customers love.

The results are in

This customer-focused strategy has been working for Planet of the Vapes. They’ve achieved 112% growth in 2017 and 62% YTD growth in 2018, and will soon be crossing into eight figures in revenue. Trustpilot has played an important part since the company is focused on continuously improving the customer journey.

“Reviews provide insights into what customers are responding to and areas of the business or our communications that need to be improved,” says Patrick. “Holistically, we’re all looking at the user journey to understand what we’re doing right and what we need to improve on.”

[Read the full case study on Trustpilot’s website here.](#)

“Our review strategy is closely aligned with our ecommerce strategy. Our customer experience is always a top priority. Trustpilot helps us improve that experience and show others the proof.”

Patrick Bissen, CEO, Planet of the Vapes

Operational failures drive consumer dissatisfaction

Spot the gaps in the customer experience

What happens after the buy button is clicked has the potential to create the most disappointment – this can translate into negative reviews that can damage a brand.

Brightpearl looked at 29,080 1-3 star reviews left by consumers rating the service of ecommerce businesses. 77% of these less-than-stellar reviews were a result of typical operational failures, such as poor customer service, or negative experiences related to delivery, returns and refund policies. There are many touchpoints after the buy button that can go wrong, from poor customer communication to items not being delivered on time or at all. Any of these operational failures can lead to an

unsatisfactory shopping experience that results in poor feedback.

It's vital to determine the specific stages where customers are evaluating and talking about their experiences - and whether there are gaps or issues that need to be addressed. Unfortunately, our report highlights that while 83% of retailers 'strongly agree' that they can identify the specific business area that a complaint relates to, only 13% have invested in technology and solutions to help them address those issues, for example, problems with fulfillment or returns.

77%

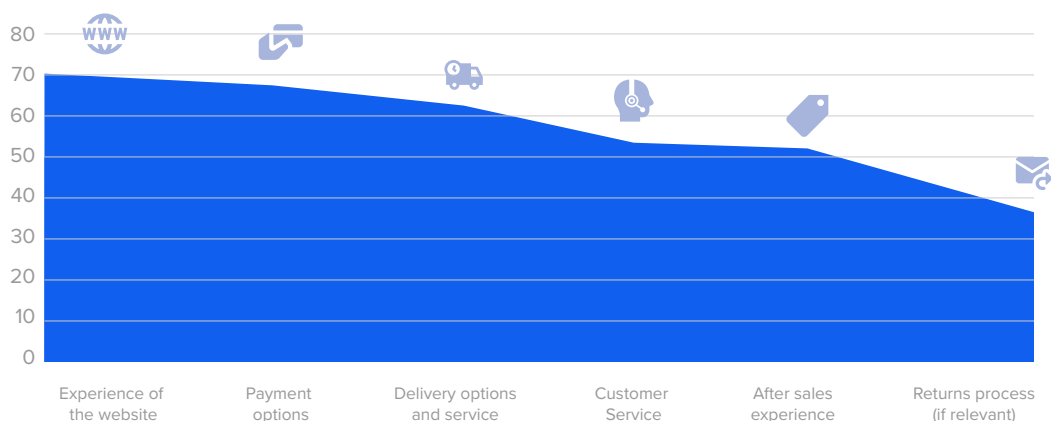
of poor reviews are directly related to issues shoppers have after clicking 'buy'

Rise of The Review Culture

The slippery slope of customer happiness

We're always told that first impressions are key. However, in the world of online retail, it is the last impression that could determine whether a shopper comes back to a brand. As the graph below shows, the percentage of customers that rate their last online shopping experience as 'very good' declines as the lifecycle of the customer buying journey progresses. As we see, it is what happens after the buy button – especially when we reach the back office operations – that is most likely to lead to poor shopping experiences and dissatisfaction.

The percentage of people who said their experience was good after the buy button



What drives negative feedback?

Keyword analysis from Brightpearl's research into 29,080 1-3 star reviews left by shoppers highlight commonalities that drive negative reviews - and, as we revealed above, it's very likely to be a result of operational failures that occur after the buy button:

Negative



1 / 5



Case Study

Mad4tools introduces Brightpearl to close gaps and deliver superior experiences

Mad4Tools.com is an online retailer that specializes in delivering thousands of products, from power tools and workwear, to lighting and electrical equipment to DIY enthusiasts and tradespeople all over the world.

The brand has successfully built a passionate and vocal community around their products by investing in excellent experiences. As Paul Swain, Director of Mad4Tools.com, explains, the business prides itself on an excellent end-to-end journey. “If a customer has a positive experience with our brand, they’re more likely to buy from us again, to tell their friends and leave positive feedback on sites like **Trustpilot**, which gives other shoppers more confidence to buy.”

Mad4Tools.com views its sector as extremely price competitive so delivery of excellent buying experiences has become a key differentiator. “We recognize that the decision to buy from Mad4Tools.com will be influenced, to a large degree, by our ratings and reviews,” says Paul. “We win business because of our positive feedback and high ratings and we retain business because of the experience we provide - from meeting fulfillment expectations, to orders being delivered as expected.”

As a result of switching from a DIY approach, Mad4Tools.com has closed the gaps in the customer journey. Paul explains: “As the entire order process is automated, from inventory updates, to automatically generated shipping labels and tracking references, to fulfillment - we’ve eliminated the opportunity for human error and improved the overall experience for our customers.”

The improvements to the customer experience have translated into an uptick in positive ratings on Trustpilot. But that doesn’t tell the whole story, as Paul explains: “What’s really impressive is that Brightpearl has helped us to expand and deliver a more competitive offering while still keeping customers happy. We’ve drastically increased our order volumes and product range since implementation and we’re committing more from a fulfillment perspective - all the while still maintaining our excellent standards of customer service. We wouldn’t have been able to do this without Brightpearl.”

[Read the full case study on Brightpearl’s website here.](#)

“Brightpearl has helped us to expand and deliver a more competitive offering while still keeping customers happy.”

Paul Swain, Director, Mad4Tools.com



Counting the cost

What are retailers paying for negative reviews?

While 76% of US retailers consider online reviews and star ratings to be 'very important' to the financial status and reputation of their business, sadly, 43% admit that they do not know how to best deal with negative reviews. Instead, they are being left, fingers crossed, hoping for the best, rather than adopting a strategic approach to understanding the cause of a negative review, responding to it and ensuring more positive reviews in the future.

Over the last 12 months, merchants estimate that they have spent around \$10,000 on average dealing with negative reviews. This can range from employing more staff to handling complaints and customer service issues, through to employing in-house social media managers and external reputation management agencies to manage online comments. Then there are logistical costs like processing returns or the cost of inventory mistakes.

But, this number doesn't factor in the potential lost revenue a retail brand might be missing out on because of a negative reputation. Our study reveals that the difference in revenue between a 3-star and a 5-star rating can be as high as 33%. This suggests that a retail brand with \$1 million in annual revenue, for example, may be losing as much as \$330,000 because of a negative reputation.

43%

of retailers do not know how to deal with negative reviews

Retailers spend

\$10,000

on average each year dealing with negative reviews

The difference in revenue between a 3-star and a 5-star rating can be as high as **33%**



Turning the negatives into positives

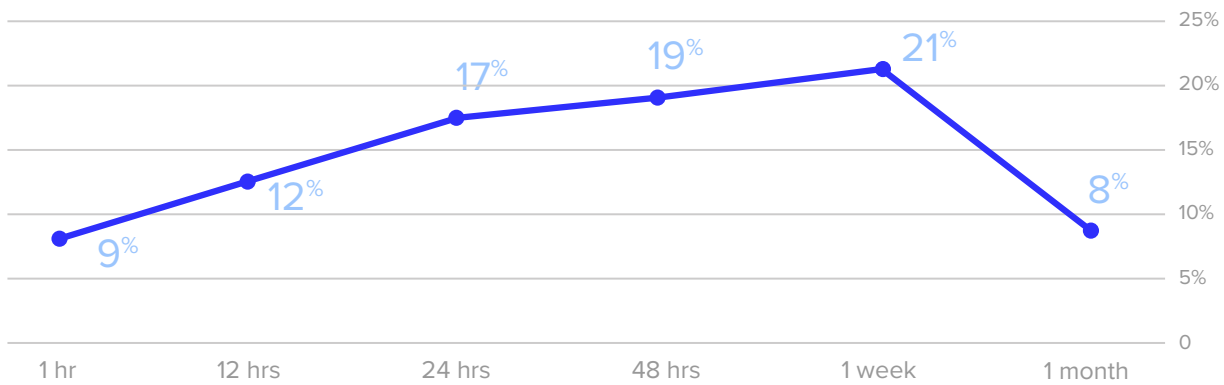
Taking control of the situation

For retailers, it is critical that they use negative reviews as an opportunity to show the speed, quality, and genuine care of their customer service within their response – which needs to come fairly rapidly. Learning to manage your negative reviews will not only allow you to collect

more consumer insights in order to identify areas of development, but will also prove to potential customers that you are a customer-centric business.

Almost one in five shoppers (17%) think that brands should respond to a negative review within 24 hours, while a further 21% believe it should be quicker than that.

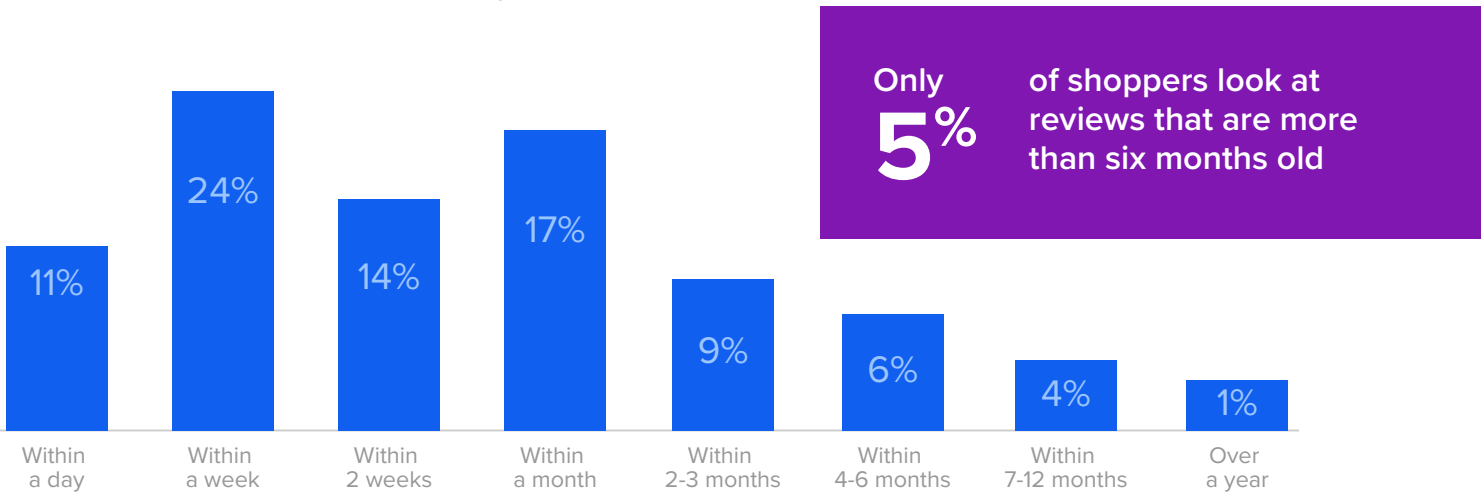
How quickly do US shoppers think retailers should respond to negative reviews?



Time heals all wounds

For one in five shoppers (20%) reviews posted within the last month will have the most impact on their buying decision. Meanwhile, very few look at reviews that are over 6 months old, underlining the importance of focusing on collecting a series of positive reviews once a negative review has been posted. However, collecting more

reviews means regularly asking for customer feedback. We understand that receiving bad reviews can be tough, but it's essential to address the issue, and try to turn negative reviews into constructive and positive feedback. Being customer-centric at all times is the only way to keep growing and improving, and receive better (and more) reviews in the long run.



When CX meets customer feedback

8 in 10 retailers in our survey agree that they can identify the specific business area that a complaint relates to. The response time can be greatly decreased by deploying modern solutions and technologies to identify a problem as soon as it arises. However, our survey reveals that just over one in ten retailers (13%) have invested in technology or solutions to help them address specific issues, such as problems with fulfillment or returns. This surprising statistic shines a direct light on why retail brands are failing to come to grips with their negative feedback.

As our study highlights, the customer perception of their buying journey - and whether it leaves a positive or negative last impression - is going to have a direct impact

on the score, volume and sentiment of the ratings and reviews a business receives.

There is a great (yet underutilized) opportunity for merchants and brands to invest in the right mechanisms to address the issues they are having with their operations.

By doing so, they can minimize the impact of negative reviews, better engage with customers and differentiate from others who are not investing in technology to support their review strategy. In addition, retailers that focus on delivering more seamless experiences for customers will be better positioned to generate and amplify positive feedback and ratings - which provides a broad scope of opportunity and benefits that we'll discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

87%

of retailers have not invested in technology or solutions to help mitigate issues causing negative reviews



The power of positivity

We all enjoy a positive buying experience and a majority of shoppers (75%) strongly or somewhat agree that they would spend more with a merchant that has excellent reviews or high star ratings.

On average, customers would spend a whopping 33% more on a purchase from a five star retailer versus one with average reviews.

75%

of shoppers would spend more with retailers that have excellent reviews or high star ratings

33%

Customers would spend 33% more on a purchase from a five star retailer versus one with average reviews

What drives positive feedback?

Keyword analysis from Trustpilot of over one million 5-star reviews highlight commonalities that drive positive reviews - and it's very likely to be operational excellence that delights a shopper into leaving favorable feedback:

Positive



Using technology to revolutionize the CX

Generating five star feedback

Shipping, returns and incredible response times are part and parcel of today's ecommerce proposition. If one touchpoint fails to deliver, then they all do – creating a poor buying experience for the consumer.

This means retailers need to work harder to identify issues in the buying journey that could negatively affect a customer's experience. Systems, like Brightpearl, can then help businesses to close those operational gaps and make the buying journey much quicker and more seamless.

Without the right mechanics in place, for example, to handle shipping and logistics, or to effectively manage returns, a business may find itself swallowed up in repeated negative reviews that will drive customers away.

On the flip side of this, positive feedback from customers can easily translate into a competitive advantage; helping a retail business to improve conversion, retain customers and increase wallet capture - particularly with regards to the latter, as our report reveals that 75% of shoppers would spend more with a merchant that has excellent reviews or high star ratings.

To capitalize in the growing review culture, merchants and brands can't just efficiently fulfill orders or deliver generic customer service - they need to expertly fulfill the modern

expectations of customers; delighting them with a superior customer experience at every touchpoint - from same-next day delivery options to real-time shipping and hassle-free return options.

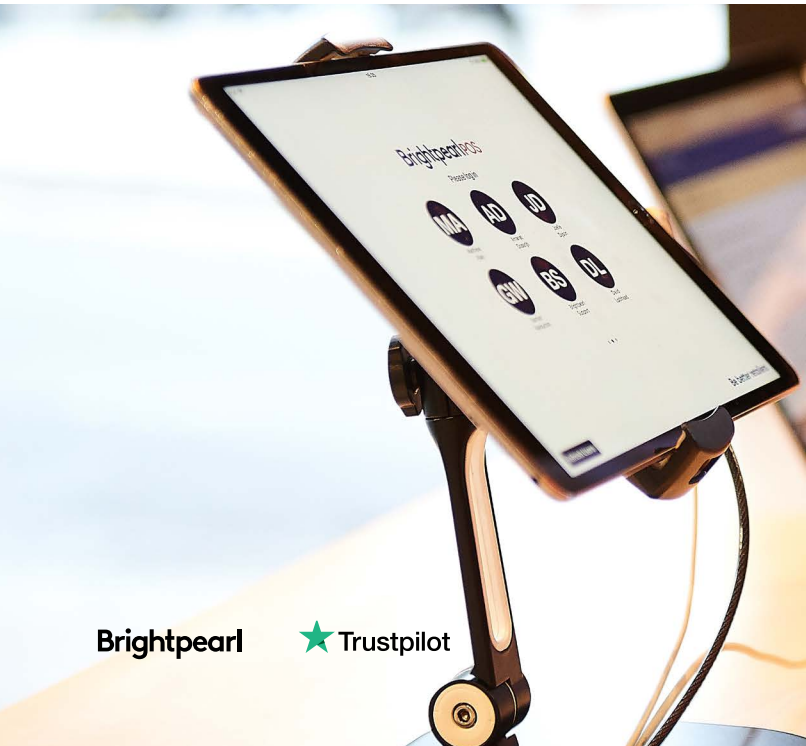
Investment in the right retail operational technologies is the key to achieving next level service delivery. The offshoot of that will be happier customers who are willing to share their experience with others; leading to the type of positive endorsements that will truly set a business apart from its competitors.

“We're now flooded with 5* Trustpilot reviews, most of which quote 'fantastic, 'great' or 'excellent' customer service. Thanks to Brightpearl, we don't just meet our customer delivery expectations, we're exceeding them, with an experience that both surprises and delights our shoppers. It has become a key competitive differentiator for our brand.”

**Andy Lockley, Head of Ecommerce,
Love Shopping Direct**

“People expect a very high standard these days. We want to ensure we offer the best experience and the best journey to the highest standard – to make every customer happy. Brightpearl has ensured we're offering our customers a seamless shopping experience, which means we're continuing to receive great reviews and ratings.”

Lynsey Wellman, Company Director, Wineware



Case Study

A focus on experience to drive repeat buys and 100% approval ratings

Malabar Bay enhances its customer journey with Brightpearl - driving customer loyalty and satisfaction in the process

Loungewear brand **Malabar Bay** was born in 2003 when founder Lalan Shrikam saw an emerging market niche: fashionable resort wear, loungewear and pajamas for discerning consumers. The brand recognized early in its existence that customer expectations are being reimaged by retailers that invest in the entire purchasing journey. To stay one step ahead, Malabar Bay wisely focused on developing excellent end-to-end customer journeys.

Lalan says: “Brands must remember they are competing with Amazon. Customers want ease of purchase - but they also want their products as quickly as possible. They can count on that with Amazon, so as a retailer, you must be able to offer similar convenience, personalization and speedy fulfillment.”

Malabar Bay now relies on a core technology stack, which includes **Brightpearl**, to meet the rising delivery expectations of its customers. Lalan says: “The technology that supports our operations makes it possible to get an item out of the door and delivered to the customer at the fastest possible rate. We now have real-time visibility over our entire inventory, which is so beneficial for delivering seamless shopping experiences. We can also identify issues and, more importantly, resolve them quickly. We reduced our 12% error rate to 2% within two years - Brightpearl made that possible.”

Brightpearl’s real-time tracking also helps the brand keep customers updated on where an order is at any stage of the journey. “If there’s an issue, we’re instantly notified so we can connect with the customer and head off any problems or potential poor reviews,” says Lalan. “It’s little details such as these that help us to deliver superior experiences that our customers love.”

These factors all help Malabar Bay deliver superior experiences, which are well-received by its buyers.

The firm now reports 100% feedback in terms of customer satisfaction.

By focusing on perfecting the retail experience, the company has created a loyal customer base. “Today, one in five customers return to buy within six months, a trend that is accelerating,” says Shrikam. “Our most-proud moments come from customers who not only call or leave positive feedback about our collections, but come back time and time again because they know they can count on us.”

“Our most-proud moments come from customers who not only call or leave positive feedback about our collections, but come back time and time again because they know they can count on us.”

Lalan Shirkam, Founder, Malabar Bay



Conclusion

This report reveals that with the rise of so many online avenues for customer feedback, consumers have started exercising their right to criticize when they receive sub-par service - and retailers need to start paying closer attention.

Most customers today will do at least one search for your company online before deciding to purchase. Indeed, the influence of online reviews and ratings on consumers continues to grow and plays an increasingly important and normalized role in consumers' purchasing behavior. As a result, businesses must be much more proactive with tackling negative ratings or reviews by addressing the root cause and responding in a timely manner.

Retailers are also increasingly worried about the impact of the review culture on their businesses. As they should be - the financial and reputational stakes are incredibly high. What may be the most concerning element to jump out of this study though is that the majority of retailers don't know how to deal with their negative feedback, or even understand the pain points that are leading to dissatisfied customers in the first place. The analysis is clear that it's what happens after the buy button that has the most potential to create the kind of disappointment that often translates into negative feedback and ratings.

It's now vital for retailers and brands to work harder to identify and then fix any issues in the buying journey that could negatively affect a customer's experience - ideally with renewed investment in their operations that will help address the failures that commonly drive poor feedback.

Systems, like Brightpearl, can help close operational gaps and make the buying journey quick, seamless and trackable. As we've seen, a positive review – or 30 –

can make a huge difference in the choices consumers make when it comes to selecting a brand or retailer. More positive reviews enhance a brand's reputation with buyers above possible competitors – leading to increased conversion, retention and spend.

To gain control over online feedback, retailers and brands need to consider retail operations platforms that will help them to fulfill the modern expectations of customers for fast and seamless shopping experiences. Once a company has the right technology in place to support its review strategy, they can be confident of generating the type of glowing feedback and ratings needed to capture the attention - and the business - of today's online shopper.

Make Brightpearl a pillar of your review strategy

If you want to find out more about Brightpearl and how we can help streamline and automate your retail operations to drive more positive customer experiences, ratings and reviews, speak to one of our consultants today.

[Get in touch](#)

Experience the power of customer reviews

Create customer confidence. Get great customer reviews. Increase conversions. Get seen on Google.

[Book a Trustpilot demo today](#)

Methodology

The research

The data used in this report is from an electronic survey conducted during March 2019.

Working in partnership with OnePoll, Brightpearl and Trustpilot canvassed the opinions of 100 retailers in the United States and the views of 2,000 consumers in this market.



Brightpearl

★ Trustpilot