

Buyer's guide: Find the perfect product sampling partner



bazaarvoice™



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Introduction

Product sampling is key to acquiring the user-generated content you need to fuel your shopper's journey and impact the full customer funnel. But it can be tricky to get right. Without proper planning and support, marketing teams can easily go over budget and miss out on ROI.

Choosing the right sampling partner can therefore mean the difference between a smashingly successful product launch and a flop.

Successful global expansion or floundering in a new market.

Revitalizing a core product or watching it go the way of jelly shoes and chain wallets.

This guide explains the key attributes you should look for in your sampling partner and why they matter to your campaign outcomes, as well as key questions to ask prospective sampling partners.





The flexibility to meet campaign needs

Just say “no” to cookie cutter sampling campaigns—they rarely deliver the outcomes you’re looking for. Instead, look for a sampling partner that offers a variety of features that can flex to match your objectives.

Factors that impact campaign needs

Products you want to sample



Are you sampling a new product the world has yet to try? An existing product that needs some oomph? Something that's heavy or hard to ship? Seasonal items? Each of these may require a unique approach to getting it into the right consumers' hands.

For example, seasonal products are only on shelves for a short period of time, so campaigns to spark user-generated content for these products must be executed within a precise timeline.

Who you want to reach



Your campaign may look different depending on your target audience size, as well as other targeting criteria (such as location, shopping interests, household criteria, etc.).

You'll almost definitely want to take a different approach for new versus existing customers. The former needs an introduction to your brand and a compelling first impression to drive conversion. For the latter, you need to lean into loyalty and how you're continuing to drive value in their life with your products.

And don't forget to consider the social platforms you want to generate awareness on, from everyday folks on Instagram or emerging CleanTok influencers on TikTok.

What you want samplers to do



Your samplers aren't likely to take your desired action without a clear call to action. Whether you want samplers to write reviews, share images or videos on social, or fill out a survey, you'll need to make a clear, effective request.

How you want to measure ROI



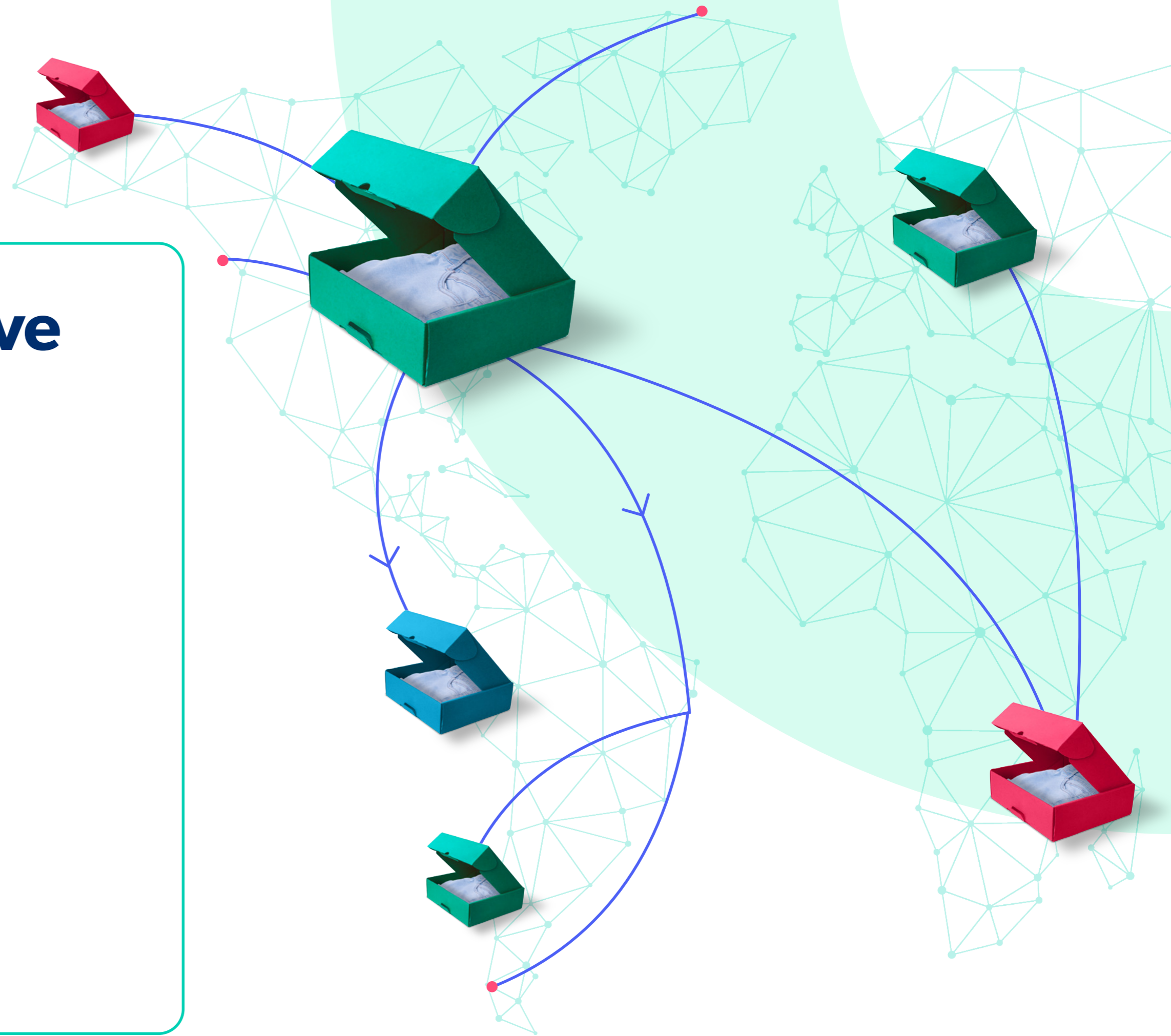
Sampling is a fabulous way to get your hands on customer insights, but only with the right preparation based on the outcomes you need to see. A sampling campaign for product research and development is going to look a lot different than a new product launch to make a big splash in the market. Your sampling vendor should be able to design your campaigns correctly to deliver the key learnings and KPIs that matter to your business.



Understand these factors to uncover the campaign customizations you'll need

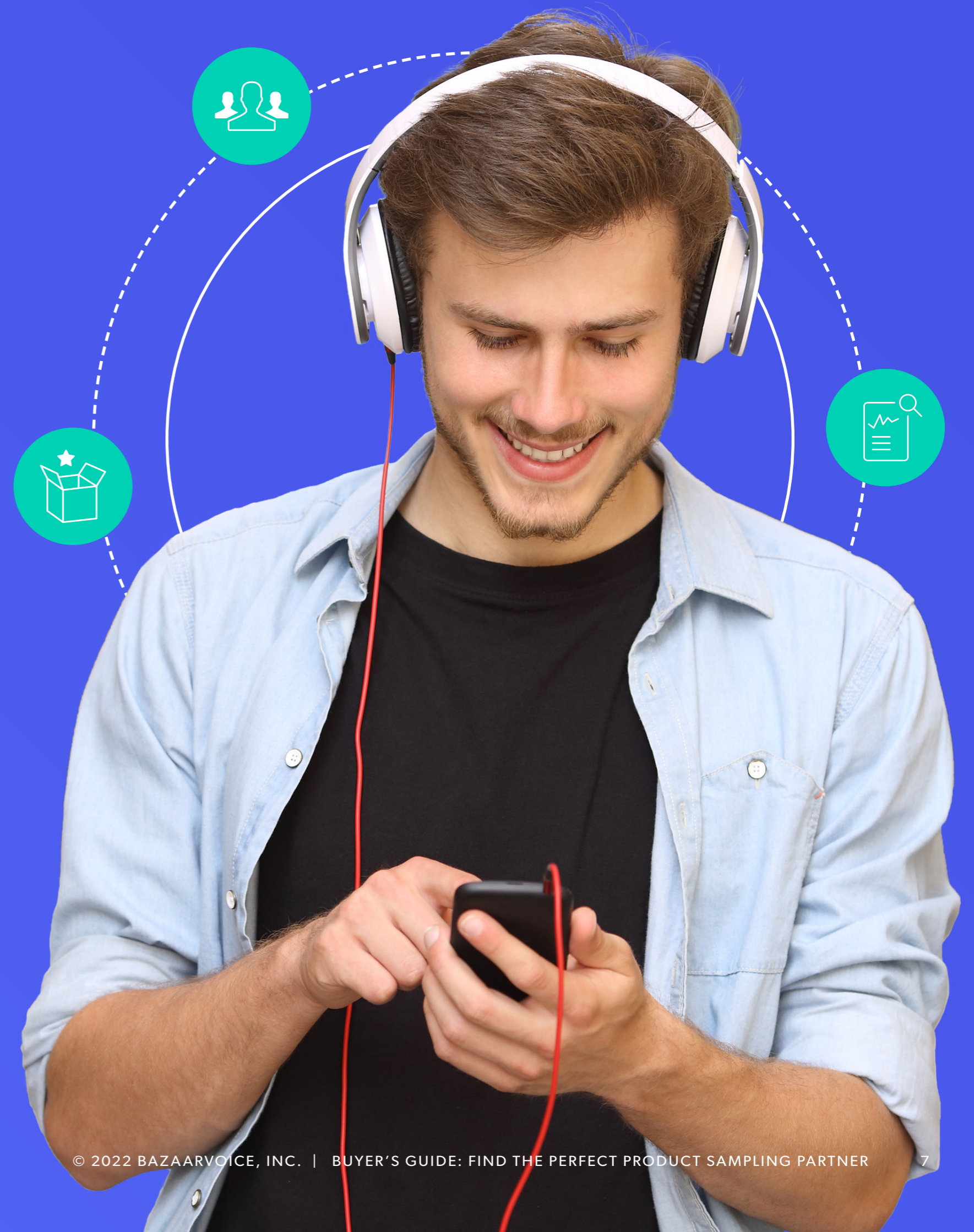
Questions to ask prospective sampling partners:

- Do you have the audience in my key markets?
- What metrics will you provide post-campaign?
- What social platforms can I generate content on?
- Do you have tools to help us measure ROI?
- How long will it take to start seeing reviews on my product pages?
- Can I provide a full size or sample size product?
- Is shipping and fulfillment included?
- How many types of delivery methods do you offer?
- How can I expedite my project?
- Can we use the members' social content after they post?
- What types of activities can we ask samplers to do?



Top-notch targeting

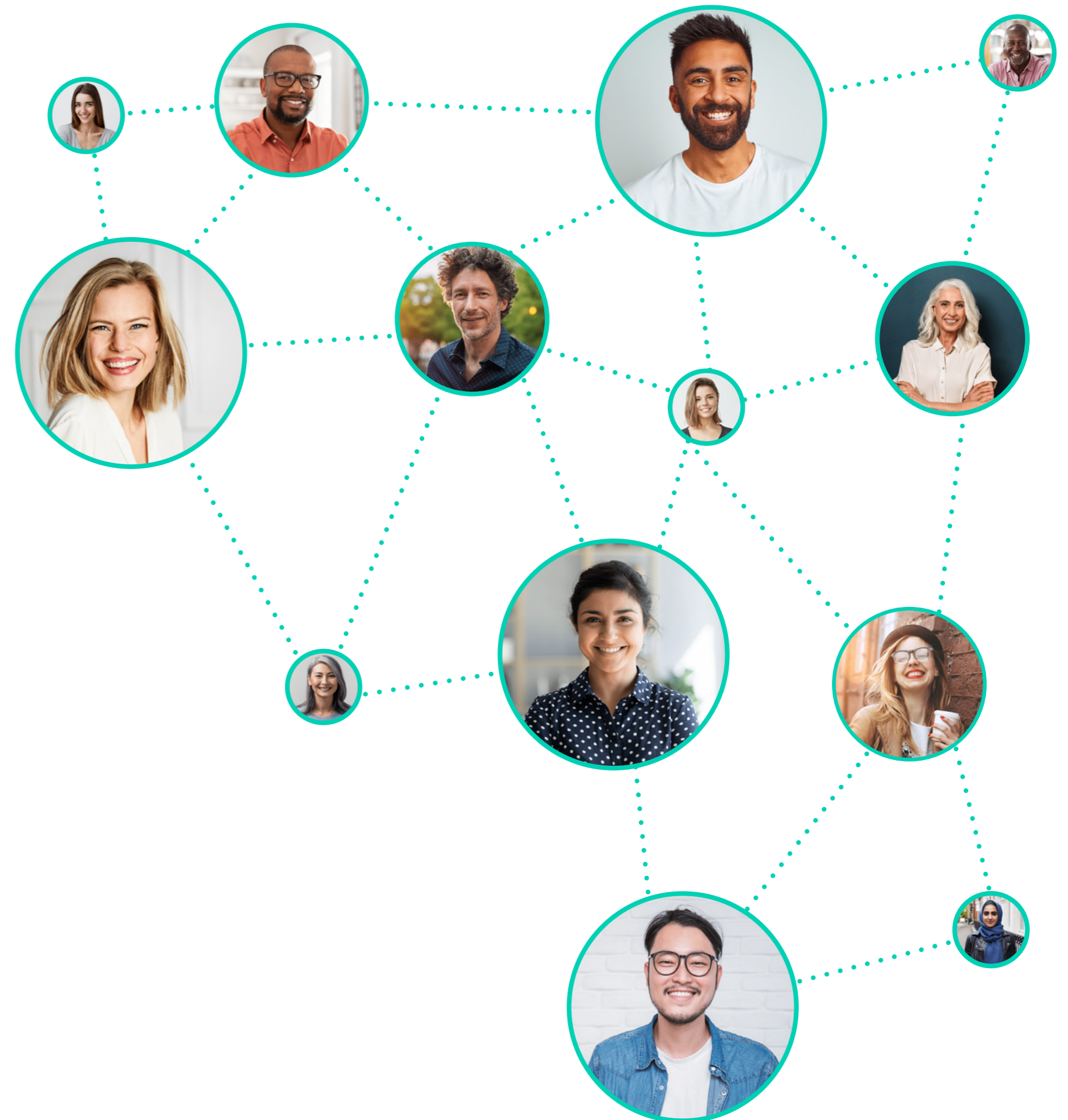
A sampling campaign is only as good as the audience that receives your samples. You need to find and connect with the exact audience that will best advocate for your brand and product. This means your sampling partner needs to have a sizable community of engaged samplers to pull from — and the data with which to find the right people within that community.

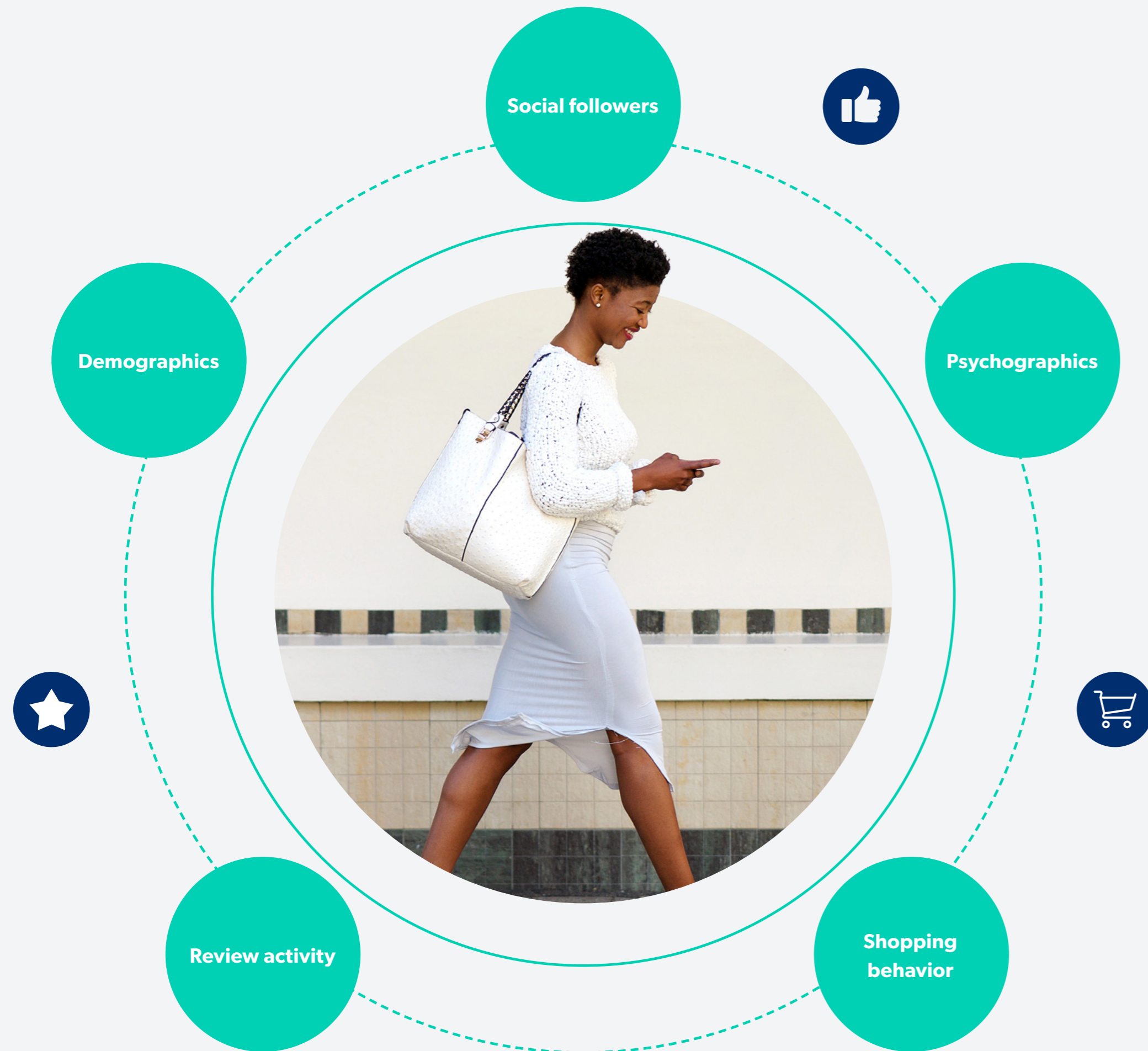


Find the right sampling community

The best sampling partners have millions of potential samplers waiting to try products (look for at least 5 million). And they're not just any samplers — they're mega influencers with large and engaged followings and everyday people (think nano- and micro-influencers) that enjoy voluntarily testing out products they discover.

But size of the community isn't your only consideration. You also need to make sure your partner has appropriate global coverage in the countries you wish to engage. Don't forget to consider any markets you may want to enter in the future.





Target the right samplers

A giant community is no good if you can't pick out the right people within it. You need to get to know each potential sampler to find the right people for your product.

For example, Sampler Susie may be a fabulous makeup reviewer, but she might not be the best fit for your lipstick campaign because she rarely buys it. Would your partner be able to tease out these specifics?

Make sure your partner can pull together a comprehensive picture of each person that's in the running from a variety of sources, for example:

- **Survey data:** Demographics, psychographics, shopping behaviors, etc.
- **Social presence:** Platforms and followers
- **Reviews:** Data from other organic reviews

It should all add up to hundreds of data points on each sampler-to-be — that help you to hypertarget exactly the people for your sampling campaign. And the best sampling partners will confirm they've found the best fits by conducting a pre-campaign survey.

How Kraft Heinz put hyper targeting in action

Kraft Heinz was launching eight new salad dressing products and wanted to ensure launch success with product reviews, visual content, and social buzz. Bazaarvoice developed three segments of samplers based on thousands of data points and sent custom packages to each segment:

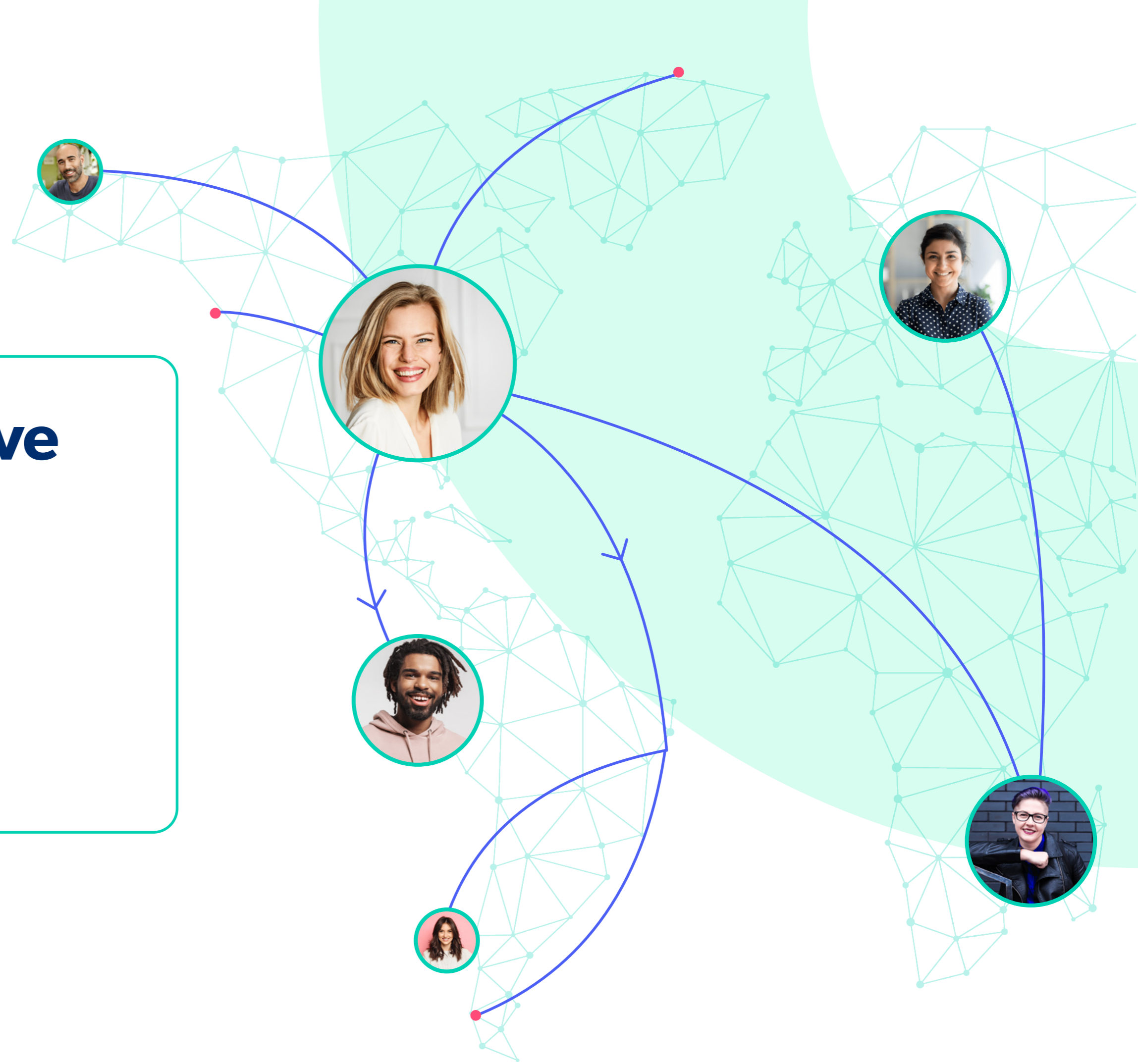


The ability to hyper-target consumers based on behaviors and other characteristics beyond typical demographics was a key benefit in choosing Influenster. It ensured we didn't just send products to a large group of people and instead to consumers who are interested in getting to know and love the brand long term.¹

Elizabeth Northrup
Associate Brand Manager at Kraft Heinz

Questions to ask prospective sampling partners:

- Where and how do you source samplers?
- How do you vet prospective participants against our campaign goals?
- Can you target global consumers? In what countries?
- How many data points do you have to find my ideal customers?
- Are samplers incentivized?





Masterful with fulfillment

There isn't much sampling happening if your product doesn't make it to the sampler efficiently and on time. And the more vendors that are involved in the process, the more likely you are to hit snags, go over budget, and miss deadlines.

With this in mind, it's important to choose a vendor that offers multiple fulfillment options under a single roof — while consistently delivering on an exceptional sampling experience.

Get products in shoppers' hands

The best sampling vendors will allow you to choose from multiple options for getting your product into shoppers' hands — even if the product is difficult to ship.

- Vendor ships
- Your brand ships directly
- Digital coupons for in-store and/or online redemption

Fulfillment options	Advantages	Disadvantages
Vendor ships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less labor intensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited control over logistics
Your brand ships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More control over logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More labor intensive• Requires additional vendor or in-house capabilities
Digital coupons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No shipping required• Drive retailer support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slower timelines to gather reviews



What are digital coupons? Digital coupons are a versatile fulfillment option for product sampling campaigns. They encourage shoppers to purchase their own samples and get reimbursed (cash back) for all or some of the cost.

For example, Kosas Cosmetics offers a cash back program in which shoppers get store credit for every sample they purchase, which can be used for any future purchase.² This approach encourages Kosas samplers to buy full-size cosmetics or additional samples with their credits and reduces waste by ensuring shoppers are invested in the sample.

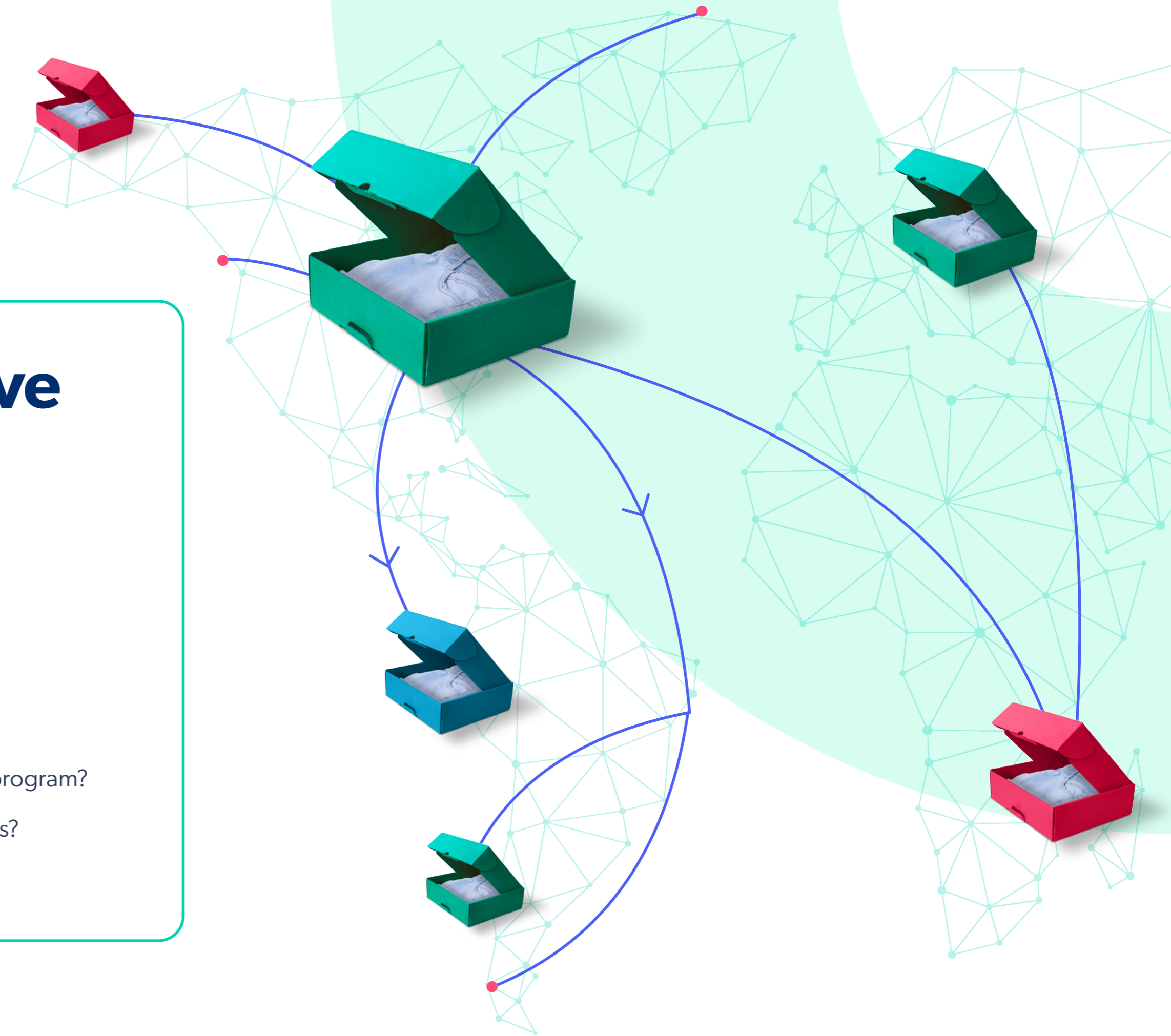
Looking to grow your relationship with key retailers? A sampling campaign that's activated with digital coupons is a great way to drive traffic to retail partners both in-store and online. Protip: Ask your sampling provider which retailers they partner with for in-store or online cash back redemption offers.

Not every product is easy to pack, ship, and share. If you have any heavy or bulky items, alcohol, or perishable items, make sure your sampling partners offer a cash back redemption option.

Finally, don't forget to consider the locales you'd like to sample in. If you operate in multiple countries (or hope to in the future), your partner must be able to send samples to global shoppers.

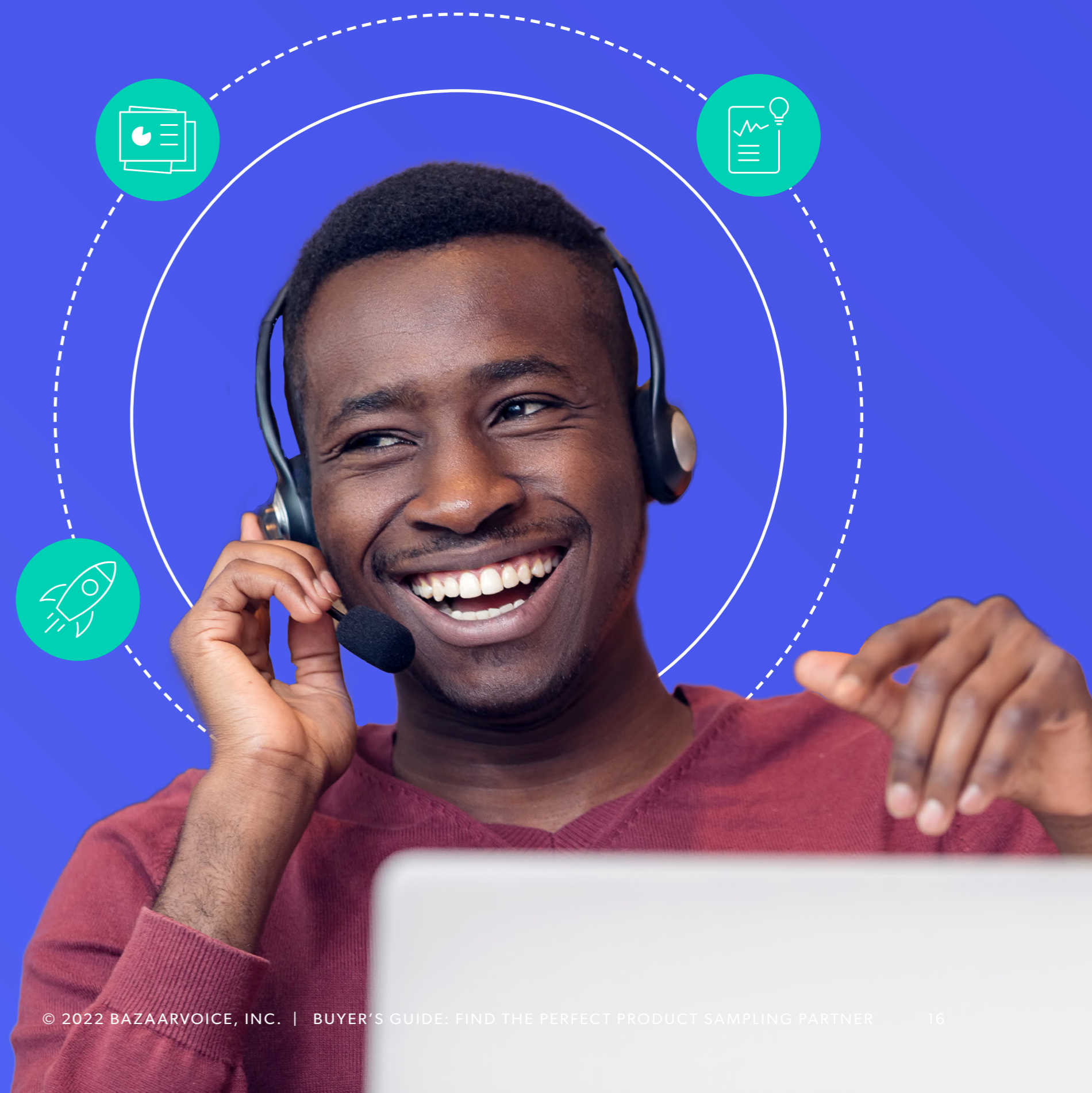
Questions to ask prospective sampling partners:

- What fulfillment options do you have?
- Can you streamline fulfillment? Or will I have to work with multiple vendors?
- What is the average timeline to launch?
- How do you sample heavy or bulky items? What about seasonal items?
- Can you send samples to global consumers? What is your reach?
- Do you offer cash back sampling or any other type of digital reimbursement program?
- Which retailers do you partner with for in-store or online reimbursement offers?
- What options do I have for customizing the box and packaging?



All the (dedicated) support you need

There are a lot of moving parts in a good sampling campaign, and execution can be a significant undertaking. If you're working with a lean marketing team, you'll benefit greatly from partner support in the form of campaign management.



What end-to-end campaign support looks like

Campaign planning and preparation



During this stage, you work with your sampling partner to build a custom research plan for your campaign. This includes documenting product details, setting targeting parameters, and laying out campaign tasks. The right partner will take care of selecting shoppers for your campaign, as well as printing and kitting sample boxes.

- Select campaign participants
- Assemble sample boxes

Launch



At time of launch, your sampling partner can offer support by shipping your products directly to your program participants. As participants complete their campaign tasks, your partner should manage communication to ensure participation.

- Ship sample boxes
- Track campaign activity

Wrap up and reporting



At the conclusion of your campaign, your partner should send a post-campaign survey to generate product feedback, purchase intent and more. Once the survey is complete, your sampling partner will support you with a final report on campaign performance and consumer feedback.

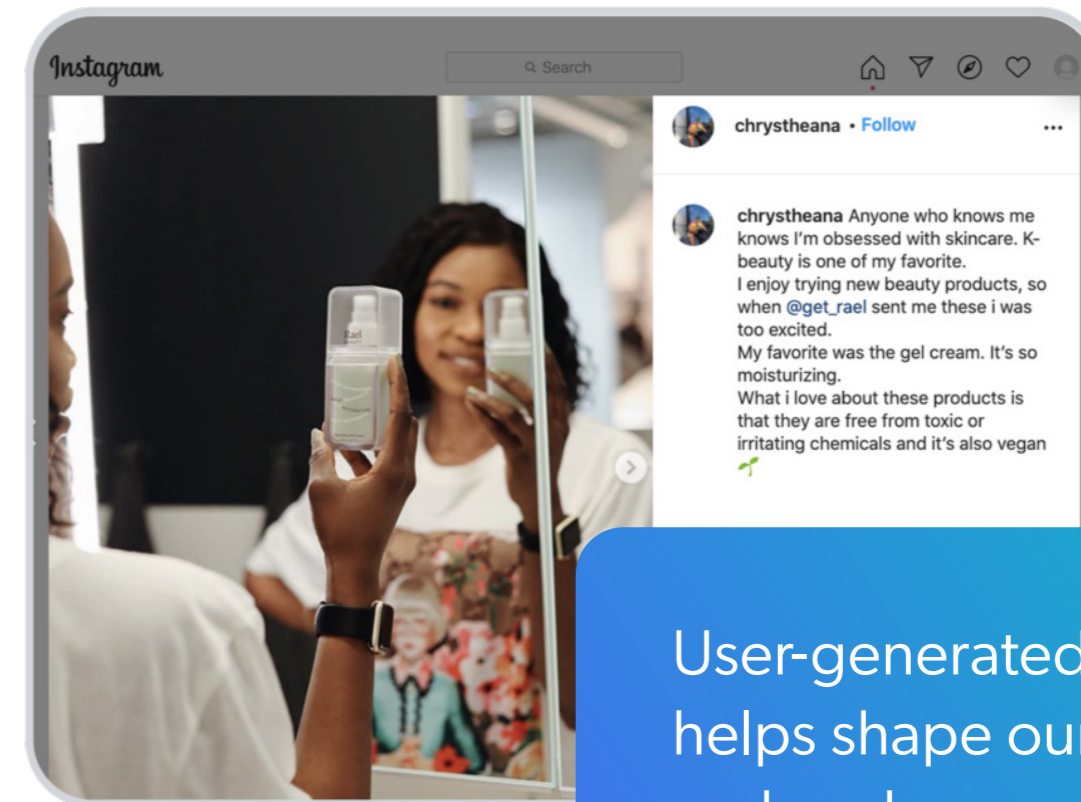
- Send post-campaign survey
- Report on campaign performance

Startup skincare brand relies on dedicated campaign support

Rael entered the beauty space by developing a line of skincare products geared toward usage at different phases of a woman's cycle. The brand needed to build awareness, establish credibility, and drive trial of new products — and they knew they'd need outside assistance to make it happen.

Rael used Bazaarvoice Sampling to send products to select members of the Influenster community of 7 million consumers. Through two sampling campaigns, Bazaarvoice curated and sent a total of 2,000 custom boxes with Rael's skincare products to a hyper-targeted audience of ideal buyers.

Bazaarvoice managed everything from campaign planning to box design to fulfillment to campaign reporting—and the sampling campaigns resulted in 3,000 total reviews (300% more than the initial goal).

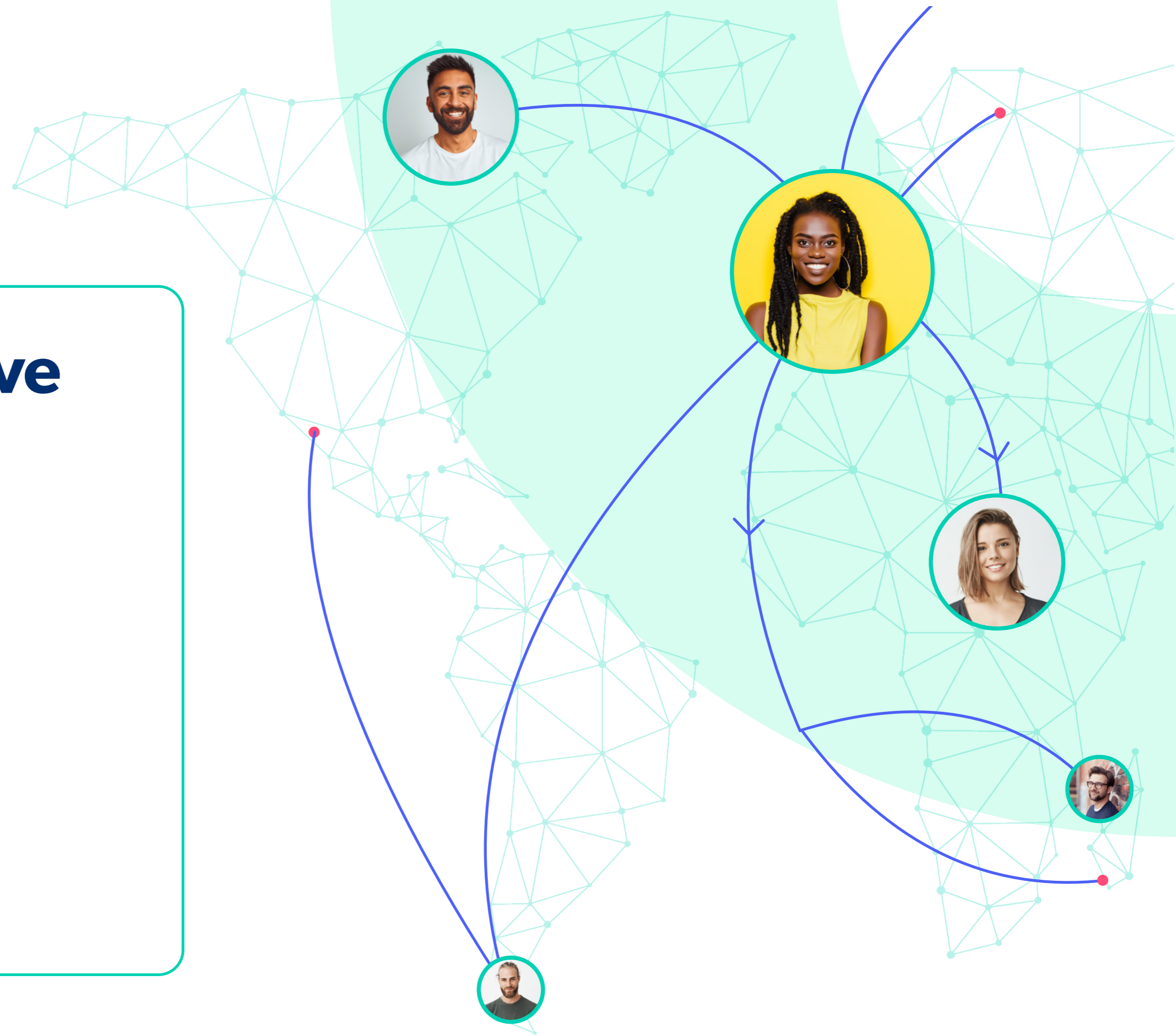


User-generated content helps shape our future, and we have a partner that lets us take advantage of it and that plays a vital role in our continued expansion.³

Sorah Park
CMO at Rael

Questions to ask prospective sampling partners:

- Do you provide a dedicated account manager?
- What campaign planning services do you provide?
- Do you conduct a pre-campaign survey?
- Do you have an in-house design team to create an on-brand experience?
- What services do you provide to support our execution?
- Do you conduct a post-campaign survey?
- What reporting services do you provide?
- What will I have to do on my end (i.e. how hard is this going to be for me)?
- What other brands have created sampling experiences for?





Campaign activation and engagement

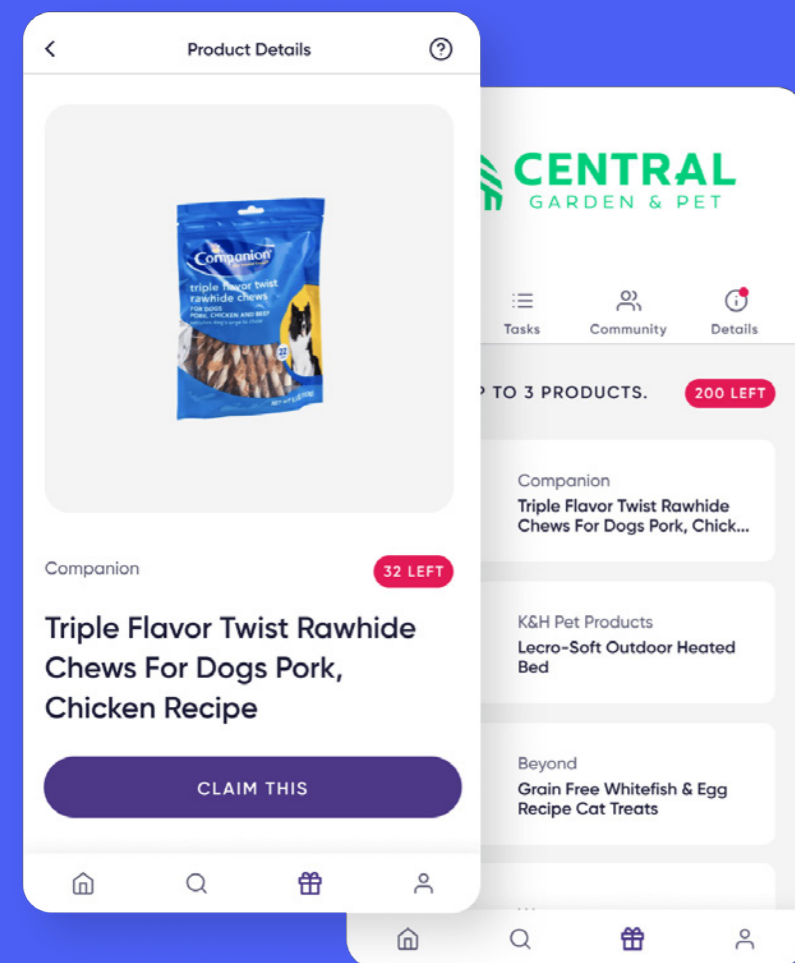
Identifying and reaching samplers isn't the end of the line. You also need to encourage them to test out your product and complete your desired action (offer feedback, write a review, share on social, etc.) — and your campaign experience plays a significant role in making it happen.

Deliver an elevated sampling experience

The best sampling partners will offer a fun and easy-to-use platform or app in which shoppers can accept projects based on their personal interests and submit the desired content. These platforms should guide samplers step by step through the sampling process. Gamifying this process in the app also encourages samplers to participate and guides quality content creation.

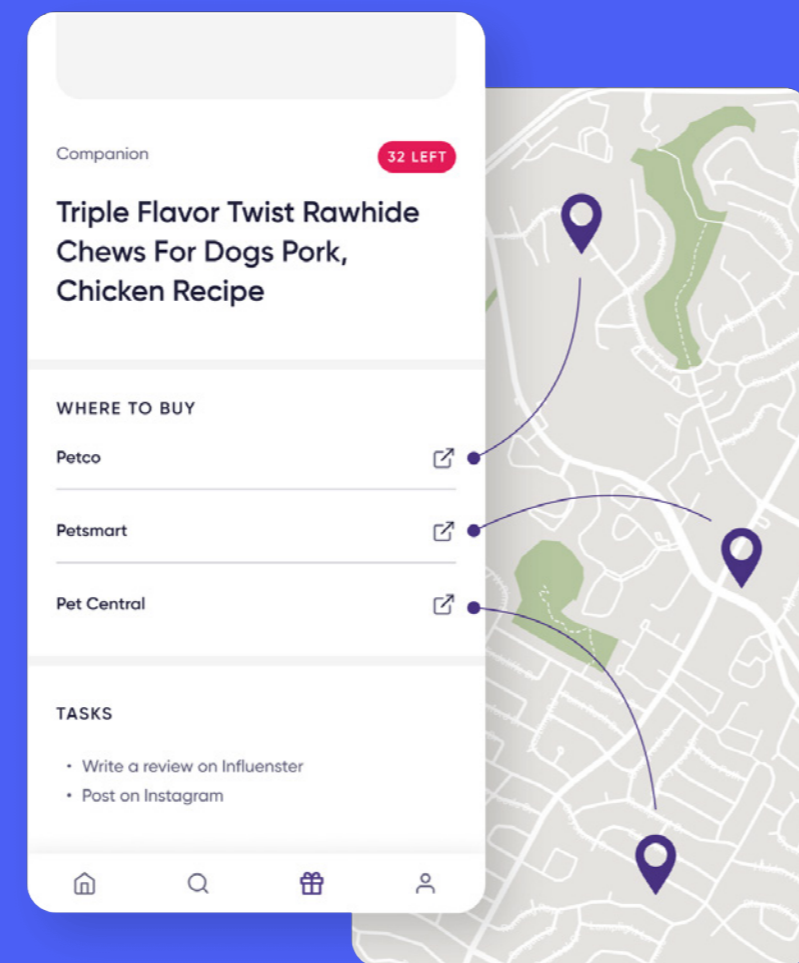
STEP 1

Opt-in to an offer or campaign



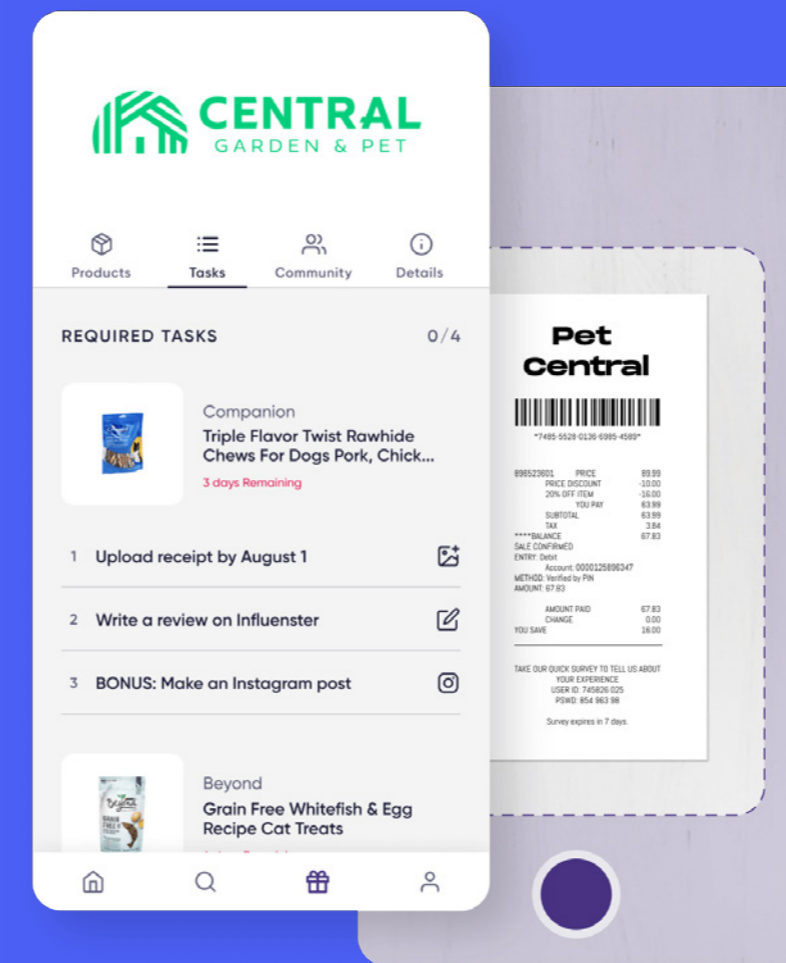
STEP 2

Head to the nearest retailer and purchase redeemable items



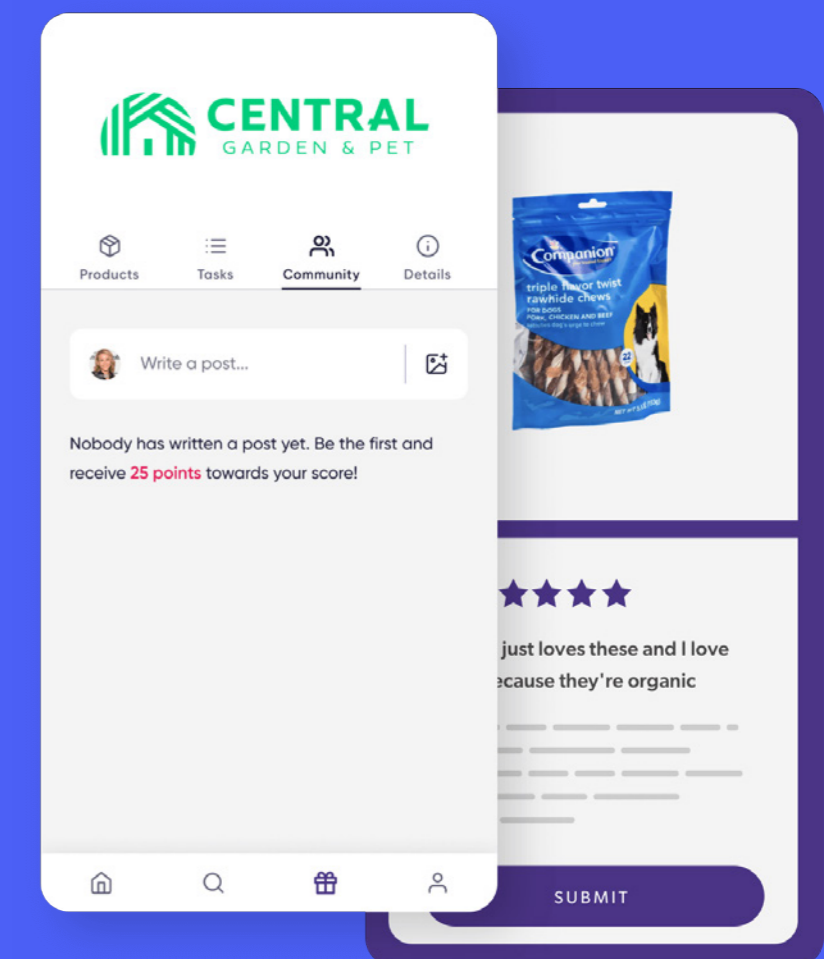
STEP 3

Upload the purchase receipt



STEP 4

Write a review and post an image or video of the product on social media



Collect all the content you need

There are plenty of sampling partners to help you collect reviews. Or photos. Or feedback. But if you want reviews AND photos AND feedback, you have a much smaller pool of potentials. The most efficient and cost-effective sampling campaigns will help you curate whatever kind of product feedback or user-generated content you need from your shoppers to meet your goals.

For example, when Kraft Heinz was launching that set of new salad dressings, the goal was to activate key consumers to generate reviews, visual content, and social buzz—all at once.

369,000
social
engagements

20,000
new reviews

\$1.9M
earned
media value



The campaigns for Kraft Dressings Vinaigrettes, Twisted Ranch, and Bitten over-delivered on our targets for the program, delivering 2x the product reviews we expected, and the earned media was over 5x our program investment.

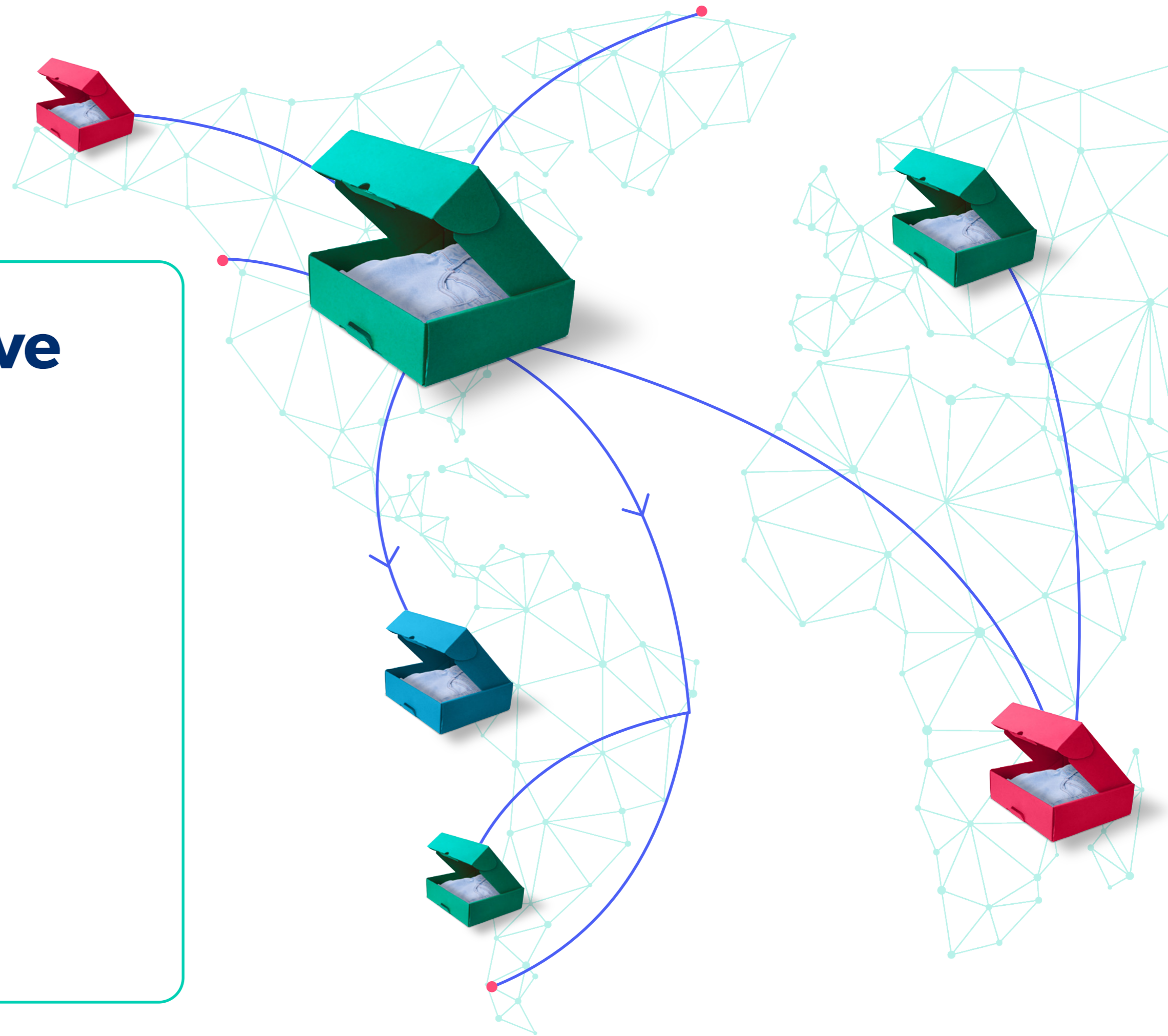
Elizabeth Northrup
Associate Brand Manager at Kraft Heinz

Questions to ask prospective sampling partners

- What sort of experience do you provide for consumers?
- Do you offer an app for your samplers?
- How do you encourage high participation rates?

Can you collect...

- Text-based reviews?
- Social posts?
- Photos?
- Videos?
- Product feedback?
- How many types of content can you collect in a single campaign?



Insights to impress your boss

One of the prime benefits of digital product sampling is the amount of valuable data you collect during your program. Unfortunately, according to Bazaarvoice research, half (49%) of brands and retailers report that they do not have the resources or tools to collect insights from user-generated content.⁴

That's a giant missed opportunity. Your sampling partner should be able to mine data and draw conclusions that help you:

- Measure the impact of your sampling experience
- Improve your products
- Improve your marketing

Measure the impact of your sampling experience

User-generated content from your sampling campaigns should have a significant impact on your product and brand performance. Over three-quarters (78%) of shoppers say content from other shoppers is the most influential factor in their purchase decisions.⁵

Your sampling partner should be able to accurately measure this impact.

- Are you generating quality reviews?
- How much impact are they having at retail locations?
- What sort of impressions, engagement, and earned media value are coming out of your social posts?
- And what important consumer feedback is coming out of your post-campaign surveys?

The right partner should be able to accurately answer all of these questions to help you determine how user-generated content is affecting your performance.

Type of content

Performance metrics

Reviews

- Volume of reviews
- Quality of reviews (length, photos attached)
- Impact at retail

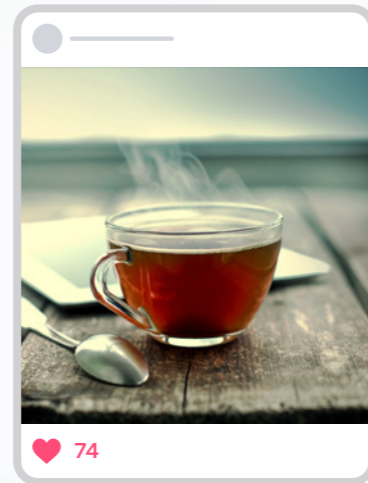
Social content

- Impressions
- Engagement
- Earned media value
- Revenue impact*

Consumer feedback

- Product favorability
- Purchase intent
- Conversions
- Brand awareness
- Brand favorability

*Bazaarvoice can measure the revenue impact of social content when sampling campaigns are combined with our Social Commerce product.



Improve your products

Your sampling campaign offers a prime opportunity to capture first-party feedback about your products directly from consumers. Timely reports of the quantitative and qualitative responses will help you to derive key themes in positive attributes — and uncover areas for improvement.

For example, customers reacted strongly to Nestlé Canada’s newly formulated recipe for one of their iced tea products.⁶ Negative reviews and customer complaints poured through the brand’s feedback channels, and in a short amount of time, sales dropped.

But Nestlé Canada’s customer experience team was able to pinpoint this issue quickly and escalate a response strategy with the brand, marketing, and product teams. Nestlé reverted to the original iced tea formula, and a few months later, the average customer rating had risen back to 4 stars from its previous 1.7 stars.

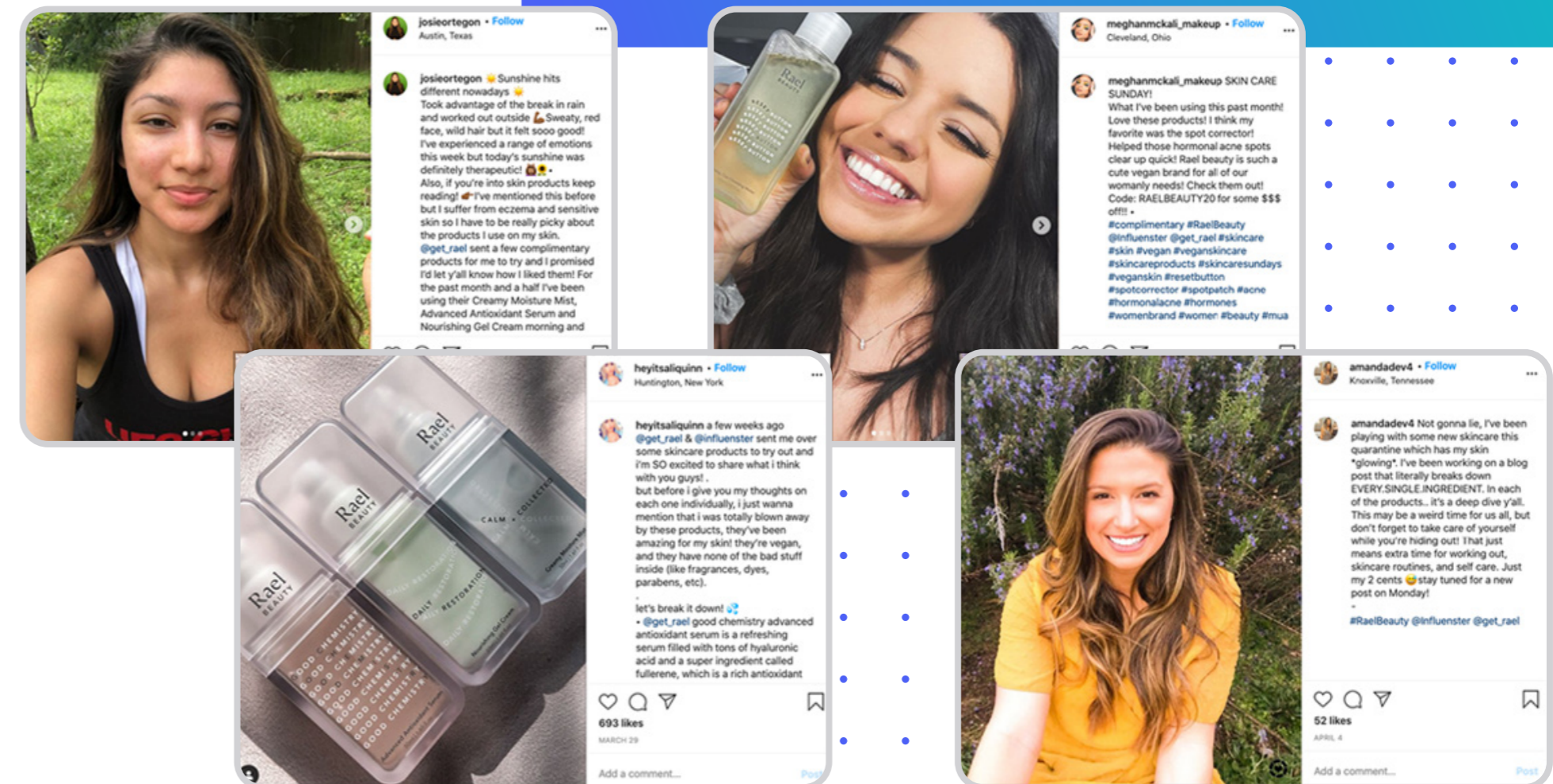
Improve your marketing

Shopper data can also help inform and enhance ad campaigns and marketing efforts. For example, sampling gave personal care brand Rael an easy and impactful way to mine customer sentiment about a variety of new products and identify ways to refine marketing messaging. Customer feedback informed Rael's decision to allocate more resources towards promoting its new facial mist.

"We initially saw it as a nice ancillary product, but from so many positive reviews from the campaign, we realized there was a lot more organic interest in this product and a product that we should prioritize and dedicate more paid media spend towards," said Park. "For another key product in the line, everyone commented on how much they loved the lightweight feel, and that's not something we initially considered a major selling point to lead with. Marketers don't always get it exactly right at the beginning. That's why insights from user-generated content are so influential."

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Questions to ask prospective sampling partners

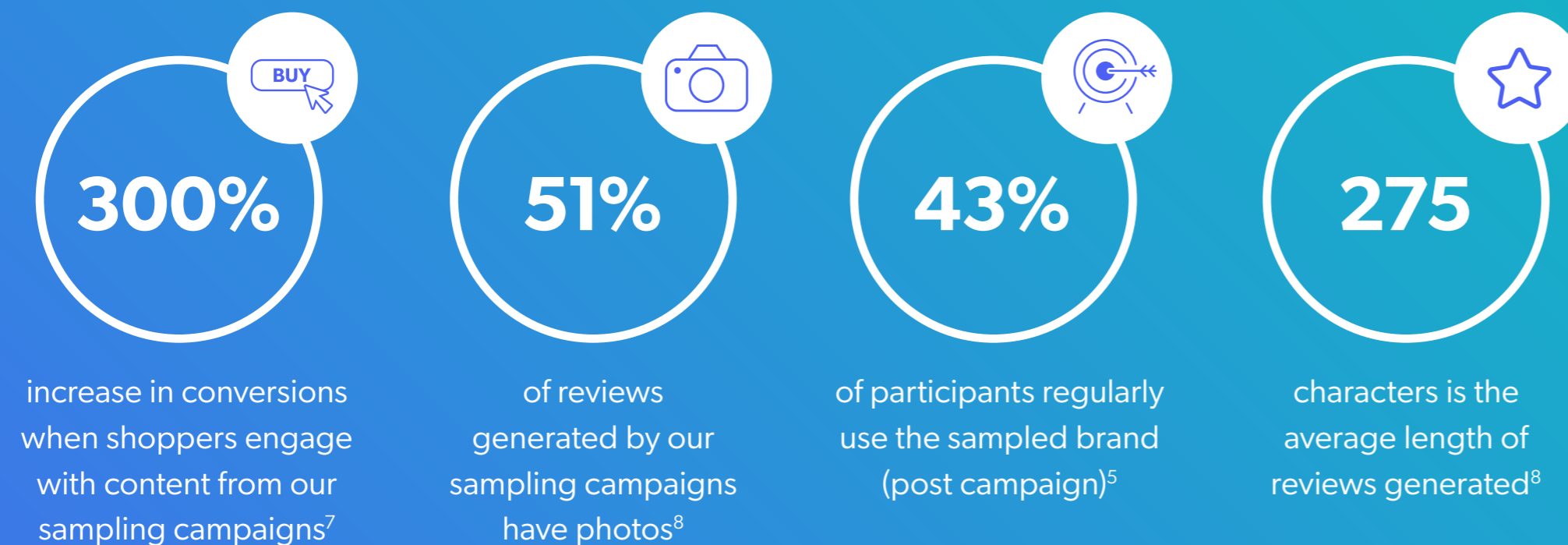
- Do you deliver insights? In what format?
- What performance metrics can you measure?
- Can you measure sales (from acquired social content) at retail locations?
- Can you measure sales (from acquired social content) on our website?
- When and how often will I receive reports?



Why Bazaarvoice?

In case you haven't noticed yet, not all sampling vendors are created equal.

Bazaarvoice Sampling offers the solutions and support needed to drive results—whether the objective is to raise brand awareness and social buzz, collect reviews for an upcoming product launch, fuel your social commerce strategy, or collect actionable product feedback.



Ready to get started with Bazaarvoice?

Talk with an expert

FLEXIBILITY

Customize turnkey programs to your product, audience, and goals.

TARGETING

Hyper-target your samplers from 7M+ member Influenster community—using thousands of data points.

FULFILLMENT

All logistics are covered, from shipping to fulfillment, and included in the cost (no surprise fees).

CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT

Your dedicated account manager plans, launches, and monitors your campaign to ensure success.

ACTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Bazaarvoice Sampling members participate in campaigns directly with our consumer-facing app. This drives engagement and gets you more content in return.

INSIGHTS

Accurately measure campaign performance and gain actionable insights for product and marketing improvements.

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Thousands of the world's leading brands and retailers trust Bazaarvoice technology, services, and expertise to drive revenue, extend reach, gain actionable insights, and create loyal advocates. Bazaarvoice's extensive global retail, social, and search syndication network, product-passionate community, and enterprise-level technology provide the tools brands and retailers need to create smarter shopper experiences across the entire customer journey.

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Making shopping smarter.

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