Choosing a ratings and reviews provider

Key criteria and questions to consider when selecting a user-generated content platform

What's inside

bazaarvoice:

Introduction

Shoppers today expect access to product reviews to guide their purchasing decisions, and with so much word-of-mouth content available, they are more empowered than ever. In fact, nearly half of shoppers say they are less likely to buy from a brand or retailer if they don't have reviews on their sites, and 70% of shoppers use reviews to evaluate similar products before buying[1].

Fortunately, this provides brands and retailers with the opportunity to leverage user-generated content (UGC) to drive significant business value.

Consumer preference towards recommendations from peers is not new, but what does continue to change and evolve is the technology behind various UGC platforms and how providers differ in capabilities, retail network reach, expertise, and other factors.

A UGC strategy done right can increase the discoverability and awareness of your products, boost sales, help your business talk in the language of your customers, and provide you with a new touch point to create a dialogue. It can also inform site and page optimizations, provide insights for product improvements or innovation, reduce return rates, and ensure your shoppers have a positive shopping experience. However, reaping all of these rewards requires partnering with the right UGC technology partner for your specific marketing and business needs.

46%
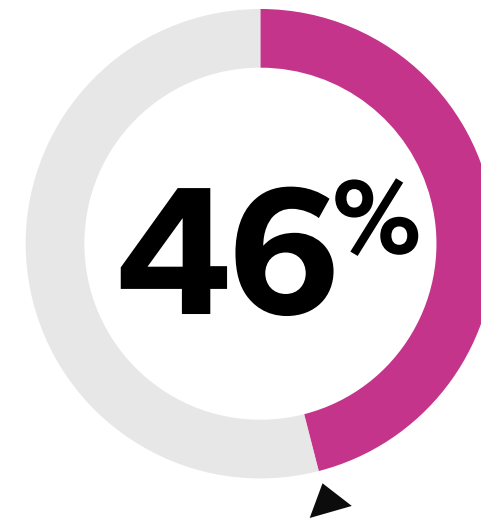
Nearly half of shoppers are less likely to buy from a brand or retailer who doesn't have reviews on their site[1].

70%
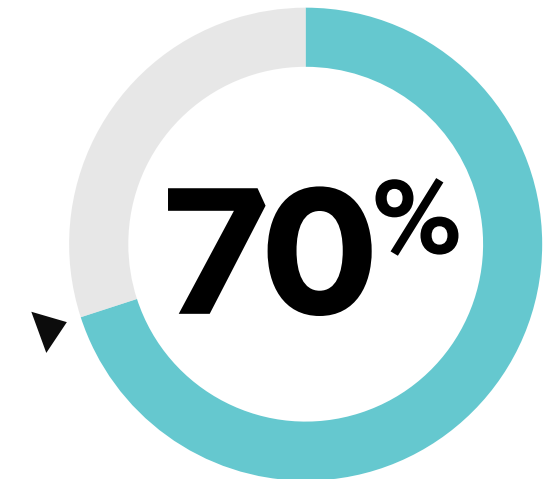
More than two-thirds of shoppers use reviews to evaluate similar products before buying[1].

Regardless of where you are in the process and why you are considering the investment, selecting the right partner is crucial and requires some diligence on your part. This guide equips you with important considerations and questions to ask to find the right fit.

How UGC drives measurable results

AWARENESS

63% of brands and retailers say that ratings and reviews impact SEO[2].

31% of shoppers discover brands through word-of-mouth recommendations[3].

CONSIDERATION

36% say reviews from other customers most motivate them to buy a product online[3].

47% of shoppers consider online customer reviews to be an influential source of information, second only to recommendations from family or friends[4].

UGC in the shopper journey

LOYALTY

1/3 expect a brand to respond publicly to their review, regardless if their review is positive or negative[5].

#1 When shoppers leave negative feedback for a business, the number one thing they want as a result is their feedback implemented[5].

DECISION

39% of shoppers say reviews are the most important part on a product page[5].

138% lift in conversion when shoppers engaged with reviews on best-in-class sites and 111% with Q&A[5].

Evaluation checklist

Before you start in-depth discussions with UGC providers, you first want to consider and detail some of your requirements by following these steps:

DEFINE
Define what success looks like for your business today and in the future.

EVALUATE
Evaluate what has been successful about your current UGC strategy and what hasn't.

IDENTIFY
Identify key stakeholders, understand their potential involvement and how they might be impacted, and prioritize their differing departmental goals.

DECIDE
Decide where you want to display and showcase your UGC (your website, retailer websites, social media, etc.).

OUTLINE
Outline your mandatory and desirable functionalities.

CREATE
Create list of questions to evaluate providers and document and compare answers.
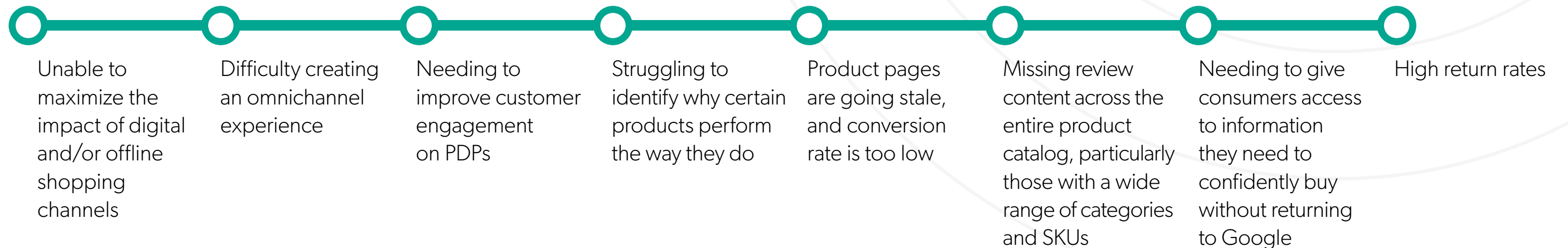
Define success for your business

Leading brands and retailers invest time upfront to lay out their high-level goals and how UGC can support them. This sets them up for success in ultimately maximizing the business value of their program. Here are some common goals to inspire your goal-setting thought process.

The most common pain points a UGC program can solve:

FOR BRANDS

Shoppers not feeling confident in their purchase decisions

Struggling to launch new products

Difficulty developing and maintaining brand loyalty

Struggling to identify why certain products perform the way they do

Standing out at retail and/or supporting your retail partners

Connecting with shoppers buying outside of your brand site

Needing to discover new, qualified consumers through search engines

FOR RETAILERS

Unable to maximize the impact of digital and/or offline shopping channels

Difficulty creating an omnichannel experience

Needing to improve customer engagement on PDPs

Struggling to identify why certain products perform the way they do

Product pages are going stale, and conversion rate is too low

Missing review content across the entire product catalog, particularly those with a wide range of categories and SKUs

Needing to give consumers access to information they need to confidently buy without returning to Google

High return rates

Reap the rewards of UGC across your organization

If you are reading this guide, you will likely own or contribute to your company's UGC efforts. While a successful program needs a clear owner, the impact of your investment is maximized when multiple teams and stakeholders across your company are involved.

Understanding and communicating the multitude of UGC value drivers is your key to getting investment from other individuals or departments across different areas of your company. UGC is most commonly seen as a means for increasing online conversion, but it can do so much more for your business.

This covers just a few of the teams that can directly benefit from UGC and should be involved in the program. When researching providers, it is helpful to understand the needs of these stakeholders and consider the comprehensive requirements of your entire organization and not just your own.

Marketing

C-suite

E-commerce

Customer Service

Product

SEO

Teams that benefit from UGC

TEAM & OBJECTIVE	INTERACTION	BENEFIT
Marketing Increase brand awareness and consideration	• Collect UGC • Report on complete program performance • Leverage reviews and visual content in social media, email, and other marketing content and campaigns	• Improvement in awareness • Increase in email and social engagement • Improved marketing messaging, targeting, and positioning • More compelling campaigns
E-commerce Increase online sales	• Collect and display UGC • Report on site conversion metrics	• Improved quality of product pages, including bounce rates, time on page, and site engagement • Increase in conversion rate, revenue per visitor, and average order value
Customer service Interact with shoppers and ensure they have the information and answers they need	• Respond to reviews and answer questions on brand or retailer sites • Report on engagement metrics	• Address shoppers' questions and concerns faster and at scale • Reduction in call center volume • Increase in conversion • Insight into frequently asked customer questions or common complaints • Decrease in returns
Product Develop new products and improve existing ones	• Report on product performance and product insights • View and understand performance versus the competition	• More data and visibility into consumer preferences, sentiments, and usage patterns • Implement product adjustments based on unfiltered customer feedback
SEO Acquire more qualified customers organically through search engines	• Ensure proper implementation and mark-up	• Increase in search rankings and site traffic • Gather an influx of fresh, unique, keyword-rich content
C-suite Set the strategic direction of your company	• Reporting on the revenue impact	• An increase in ROI

Prioritize your must-haves and nice-to-haves

When outlining what you're looking for in a provider, consider the following topics:

What business objectives are you trying to accomplish?

What level of insights and reporting is needed?

What types of UGC do you need to collect? How quickly?

What technical resources are at your disposal?

Is review syndication across multiple retail sites a priority?

What existing systems does this software needs to integrate with?

Do you need to display and respond in different geographic locations? Review translation?

On which e-commerce sites do you want UGC displayed?

Do you have security or privacy requirements for software providers?

Which e-commerce sites do you want to respond to customer reviews and questions on?

What questions should you ask to evaluate a partner?

Asking the right questions is a critical early step to identify the solution and provider that is best for you and your business.

The following section provides detailed guidance for these focus areas.

SIX FOCUS AREAS

Content types and volume

Strategic guidance and expertise

Network of brands, retailers, and shoppers

Product and customer insights

Platform innovation

Content integrity and security

1 Content types and volume

Will you have the right types of UGC and enough of it to turn shoppers into buyers?

UGC comes in many forms, including ratings, reviews, questions and answers, and visual content. It's important to find a provider that not only understands the unique value of each type and helps you identify the right content for your business, but also supports you in collecting more of it. After all, having just one review can boost conversion rates by 10%, and having 50 reviews can result in a 30% increase in conversions[6]. Volume of content is one of the most critical parts of a successful program, and without it, the value is significantly limited.
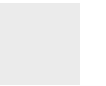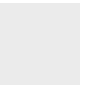
QUESTION CHECKLIST

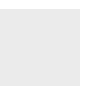What UGC do my consumers need to confidently make a purchase?

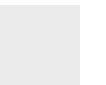What features do you offer that ensure high review submission rates?

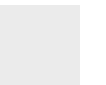How can you help me to continuously drive more review volume?

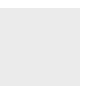What kind of collection tactic best matches my current needs? How will you help me execute?

What is the UGC submission rate for your sampling campaigns?

How is your solution going to optimize our content for SEO?

What are best practices around responding to customer reviews and questions? How will you help me prioritize which I respond to?

2 Strategic guidance and expertise

> **Will you be a true partner and invested in helping us achieve our goals, from implementation to growth?**

The right provider should be able to understand your pain points, recommend the most suitable solutions, monitor your program's health, resolve issues, show you how to measure success, teach you how to use the tools, and share expertise on UGC, industry, and retail trends. When asking questions, ensure you are getting a proactive, strategic partner and not just a reactive point of contact.

QUESTION CHECKLIST

Tell me about your global client success organization.

How will our primary contact develop and execute a UGC plan with us?

How often will we talk to our client success director, including on-site and via business reviews?

What does the overall engagement model look like between our teams?

What types of publications and events do you participate in that demonstrate thought leadership?

What kind of resources do you offer clients?

Do you have benchmark data and other ways to see how the value of our UGC compares to others in my particular industry?

How can you help me address some of the e-commerce and retail challenges impacting my specific industry and help me understand where I need to focus my efforts?

3 Network of brands, retailers, and shoppers

How can we get more eyes on our reviews at critical decision-making moments and in the places our customers love to shop?

A successful brand-retailer relationship is critical to survival, and UGC is a powerful way for brands and retailers to work together to better serve shoppers. While brands may collect UGC on their own, when they share this content to different retail channels, its value multiplies. Syndication of ratings and reviews to retailers helps brands ensure their content is available wherever consumers are shopping and helps retailers deliver an exceptional shopping experience by having plenty of content on all of their products. Ultimately, this improves sales for both parties and strengthens the relationship between brand and retailer.

Your UGC provider should help you give consumers the information they need to make a confident decision — no matter where they choose to buy.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

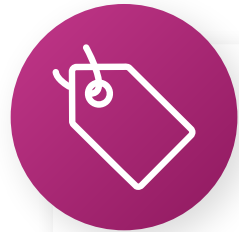How many shoppers do you reach through your network?

How many brand and retailer sites are in your network?

> Checklists for brands and retailers on next page.

Brand and retailer network questions

BRANDS

As a brand selling through a retailer, how do we respond to reviews?

What retailers can I syndicate to?

What's the most effective way for us to generate content for our retailers?

What's the process for getting our content to our retailers?

Will we see the reach of our content on retailer sites through reporting and have a way to gather any consumer or product insights?

How are you using network data to help us find new shoppers?

How do you ensure my content is properly tagged on a retailer's site?

RETAILERS

As a retailer selling multiple brands, who is responsible for responding to reviews?

Can you help us recruit brands to contribute content to our retail site?

How easy is it for brands to collect and send content to retailers? Explain the software behind this content generation. How quickly do you syndicate content?

What's the process for getting content from brands selling on our site?

What reporting will we receive on the sources of our content?

How do I ensure that all content syndicated to my site is badged appropriately, per industry/regulatory body guidance?

4 Product and customer insights

How can you help us make smarter, consumer-driven business decisions with less effort?

If you are just leveraging a UGC program to collect and display reviews, you are only scratching the surface of the platform's full potential. Best-in-class companies take the often untapped gold mine of review content and use it to uncover product flaws or areas for improvement, identify unmet customer needs, reposition their product versus competition, and gauge customer sentiment. This requires a platform that makes it easy to understand what customers are saying about your products, gives you immediate access to data and insight at scale, and lets you quickly interpret a large amount of data and glean insights for business improvement.

QUESTION CHECKLIST

What tools do you offer to help us unlock actionable insights and report on the key findings?

How can you help us compare our performance against benchmarks and other companies in our industry?

How do you help brands understand their UGC program and customer insights across different retailer sites? What technology is used to automate the process?

What is the level of effort needed to set up reports, schedule delivery, and share data across our company?

What are some examples of companies that have built better products or honed marketing tactics based on automatically generated insights from your solution?

Do you provide recommended actions for us to take based on what our customers are saying?

What kinds of reports do you offer? Can I get a demo of your reporting tools?

Do you offer reporting templates and customizations?

Do you have any way to eliminate the manual efforts needed to gather insights?

5 Platform innovation

How are your solutions evolving to meet new, broader, and more complex needs?

UGC programs should grow and have enough flexibility to address your individual needs. Your provider and the technology should always be changing to meet both the technical requirements of today and in the future.

QUESTION CHECKLIST ✓

What are some of your most recent, high-impact product innovations, including new capabilities and functionalities?

What do you have in your product pipeline that will provide value and drive long-term success of our program?

How large is your global R&D staff?

How easy to use are the tools?

Is your technology flexible enough to suit our unique needs?

What types of content are collected through a single solution?

What are the tools available for flexible configurations?

What are the display options available for our customization?

Does your solution offer an API?

How is the solution optimized for mobile?

Do you have a Mobile SDK to enable developers to build UGC in any iOS or Android application?

Are other partners and platforms integrated with your software?

6 Content integrity and security

How will you help protect my brand and my shoppers?

Authenticity and trust are an invaluable currency for companies and an essential part of a UGC program. Those who are unable to establish trust with consumers or — worse — who lose established trust simply will not succeed. You need a trustworthy partner that has you covered, from fraudulent content to data privacy, to help you establish and maintain the hard-earned trust of today's consumers.

QUESTION CHECKLIST

How do you protect me from fake reviews?

How can we reassure consumers that the content we collect is authentic?

Which fraud detection systems does your software have?

What level of moderation will our content go through before display?

What is your experience moderating in our industry?

How do you moderate in highly-regulated industries?

How have you innovated with natural language processing in order to display safe content instantly?

How are you meeting data privacy compliance and GDPR for the EU?

Do you have a fraud system contained in the EU?

What badging do you offer to meet FTC Compliance?

Is your platform WCAG 2.0 A or AA accessible?

Conclusion

Finding the right UGC provider takes time and careful evaluation. It is critical to understand that not all providers are the same. UGC programs may look similar at first glance, but when you dive deeply into each one, you will see how drastically they can differ below the surface.

Before you make a final decision, make sure you are clear on the advantages and disadvantages of each, ask the right questions, and identify where you want to go and which provider can get you there.
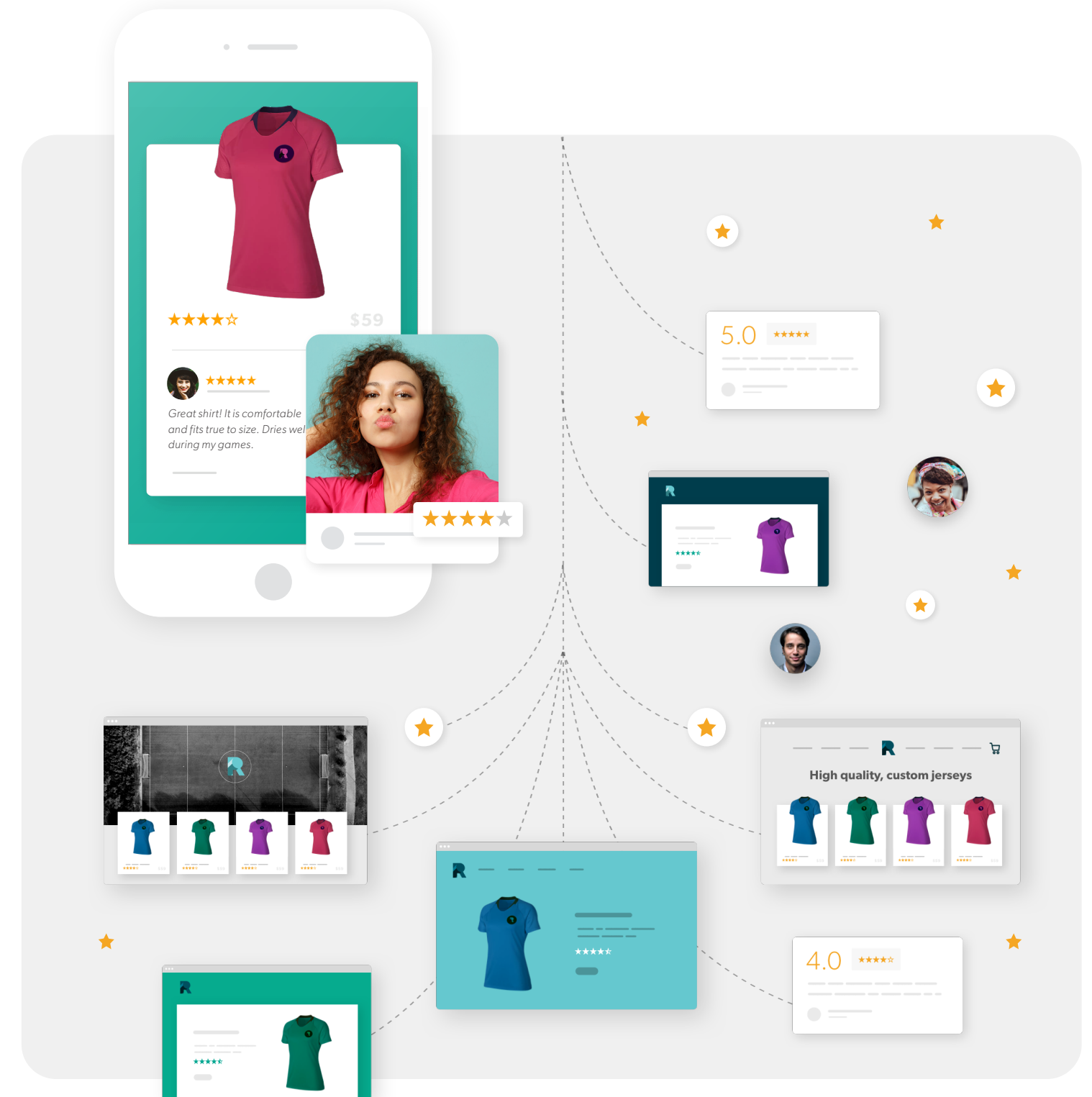
Why Bazaarvoice

Bazaarvoice connects the world's largest network of brands, retailers, and shoppers. We collect and display the most ratings and reviews in the industry and reach more shoppers than anyone else. This network allows thousands of brands to connect with retailers and distribute their UGC to the places customers shop and makes it easy for retailers to provide more than a billion monthly shoppers with the content they trust most.

Leveraging this powerful network gives us a competitive advantage to serve our clients in unique ways — from providing you reporting and insights, to our practices for moderation and authenticity, to the way our client success teams are equipped to partner with clients of all sizes and across all industries.

BAZAARVOICE NETWORK

1.1 billion
monthly shoppers

5.0 ★★★★★

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About Bazaarvoice

Each month in the Bazaarvoice Network, more than a billion consumers create, view, and share authentic user-generated content including reviews, questions and answers, and social photos across more than 6,200 global brand and retailer websites. From search and discovery to purchase and advocacy, Bazaarvoice's solutions help brands and retailers reach in-market shoppers, personalize their experiences, and give them the confidence to buy.

Founded in 2005, Bazaarvoice is headquartered in Austin, Texas, with offices in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. For more information, visit **www.bazaarvoice.com**.

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