

# Stand out on the digital shelf:

How brands can use UGC to succeed in the retail channel

# What's inside

Introduction	2
Diversify your collection efforts	4
Strengthen your customer connections	5
Gain actionable consumer insights when they matter most	6
Take UGC beyond the product page	9
The bottom line	10

# Introduction

The retail environment has never been more challenging for brands to thrive in — or more crowded with competition. The key to rising above the noise? Amplify the voices of your customers.

Just about anyone can start a brand and sell products online these days, even if they don't have products of their own. It's easier than ever to enter the playing field — and harder than ever to win customers' (and retailers') attention, consideration, and trust. At the same time, growing trends toward small concept stores and private-label products mean that retailers are working with increasingly limited digital and in-store space, and they have the luxury of selecting only the most well-known and reputable brands for filling out their inventory.

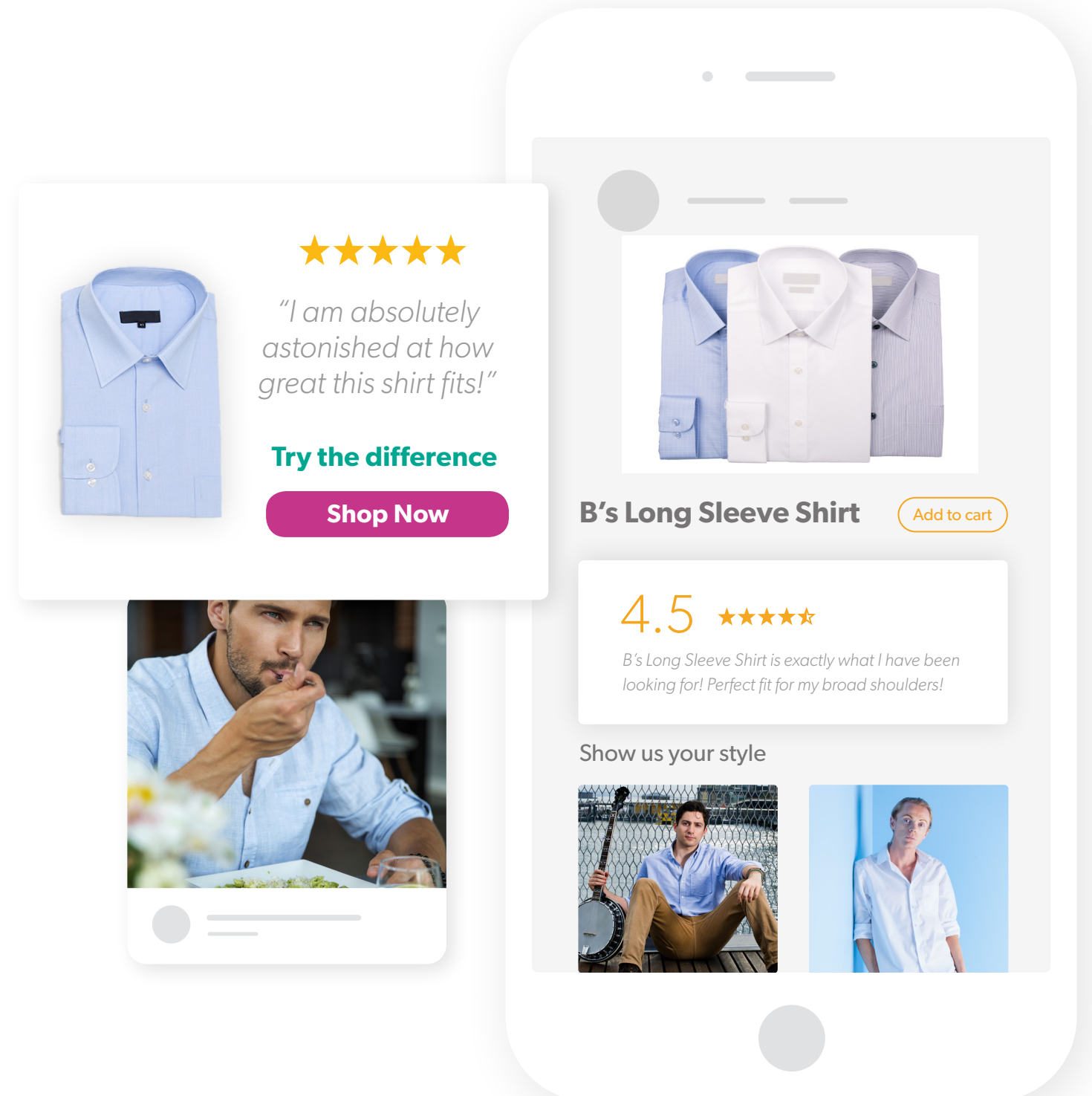
Earning a place on retail shelves isn't just about providing the best products. For brands, it's about understanding what retailers want and need to be successful. Retailers must build seamless, omnichannel shopping experiences that capture shoppers' interest and empower them to make confident purchase decisions — and there's no online content shoppers trust more than consumer opinions.



While many retailers collect user-generated content (UGC) like ratings and reviews, more and more of them are relying on brands to come to the table with their own UGC to leverage for converting shoppers. **In fact, half of Bazaarvoice retailers source 65% or more of their reviews directly from brands.** By collecting UGC and distributing it to retail channels, brands not only validate their own product quality and customer affinity, they also prove that they offer real business value to retailers looking to hit their sales and inventory goals, and gain a competitive edge.

Ratings and reviews are also key ingredients for strengthening customer relationships, giving brands the opportunity to have a direct touchpoint with consumers. Consumers are far more likely to buy when they see ratings and reviews on a product page; in the Bazaarvoice Network, **product pages with at least one review experience more than 3x the conversions than those with no reviews.**<sup>1</sup>

It may seem like a tall order for brands to scale UGC efforts efficiently and successfully, but there are several simple strategies to get ahead of the curve. Let's take a closer look at how to nurture that value — and earn coveted space on digital and store shelves — by collecting, distributing, and optimizing UGC.



# Diversify your collection efforts

Enabling ratings and reviews collection is one thing, but creating awareness and convincing customers to submit them can be challenging. Here are a few easy strategies to jumpstart your collection efforts and build your library of UGC.



## GENERAL EMAIL REQUESTS

Send an email to contacts in your CRM list to request ratings and reviews for products they've purchased in the past. If you're not sure exactly what item they purchased, direct them to a generic review submission form with a product picker. Don't have a CRM list? No worries. Read on.



## POST-INTERACTION EMAILS

Do you know which customers have recently made a purchase? Whenever someone buys a product, send out an automated post-interaction email to ask for their feedback. These emails can also be triggered by non-transactional actions, like product registrations and coupon downloads.



## PRODUCT PACKAGING

Include a call for reviews on product packaging, inserts, or on the product registration card. The URL should be short and simple. This tactic is especially useful for brands without a direct way to connect with customers.



## SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Meet your customers and advocates where they are by running a promotion through social media for the chance to win a prize or free product in exchange for submitting honest product reviews. You can also do this over email.



## SAMPLING

A sampling campaign is a quick and reliable way to accelerate review collection and get authentic customer feedback in exchange for complimentary sample products. Launch new products with reviews on day one, boost your review volume, and get insights into your products, all while building customer engagement and loyalty.

# Strengthen your customer connections

User-generated content, including ratings and reviews and product page Q&A, is an increasingly common way for customers to not only share feedback, but also to have a one-on-one dialogue with brands. Responding to customer reviews and questions can help you manage the impact of negative experiences, retain customers, and create a more positive overall impression of your brand for both shoppers and retailers. As mentioned, retailers have limited shelf space, so they expect the brands they work with to be attentive toward customers who have taken the time to offer feedback.

Shoppers increasingly expect a level of genuine, human interaction in the shopping journey, and the time and resources required to respond to customers can yield quantifiable returns. **In 2018, best-in-class Bazaarvoice clients saw a 114% lift in conversion and a 120% or higher lift in revenue per visitor when shoppers engaged with product page Q&A.**<sup>2</sup>

In addition to collecting new UGC, brands should also prioritize responding to existing customer reviews and questions in a timely, helpful manner.

Responding to reviews may even help boost review volume. A recent Harvard Business Review study found that **businesses that responded to online customer reviews saw a 12% increase in review volume** and a small increase in their overall rating over time.<sup>3</sup> Even when reviews are negative, a response can go a long way. Wakefield Research reports that a shopper's intent to purchase doubles when they see a brand's response to a negative review, compared to seeing the negative review with no response.<sup>4</sup>





# Gain actionable consumer insights when they matter most

Ratings and reviews can be more than just a valuable content asset. They're a direct line of customer feedback that can help flag product flaws, inform strategic decisions, and enable you to make key adjustments that maximize customer satisfaction and sales.


When Tommy Bahama discontinued their highly rated Survivor Shorts, they saw a strong customer backlash emerge in their reporting around sentiment trends. They resurrected the shorts through a campaign that included customer review quotes, and **sales increased by more than 600%**, making the shorts one of the brand's most lucrative products.<sup>5</sup>



 ★★★★★ 3.0

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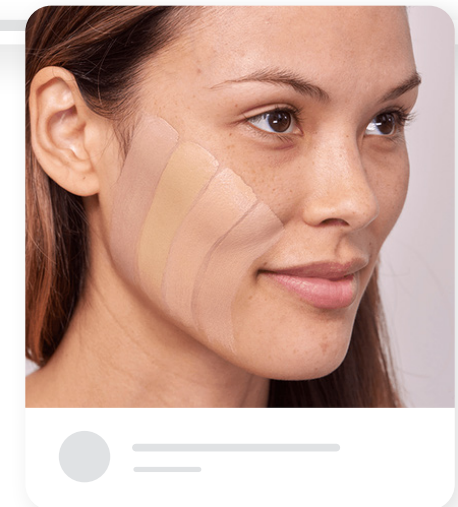
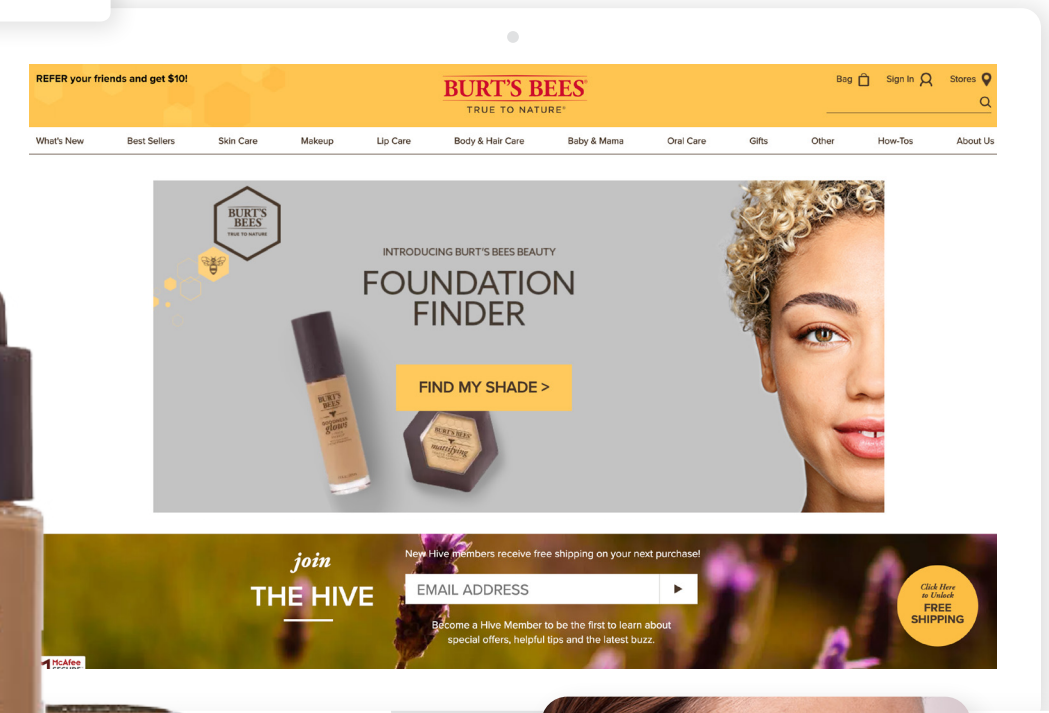
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*So happy this short is back...  
Comfortable, great fitting and  
a nice assortment of colors.*



Sampling is a great tool for gathering these kinds of insights before a product hits the market. While jumpstarting review collection, sampling campaigns also provide an opportunity to uncover potential problems before your product hits a wider market (which can help you avoid liabilities with retail partners further down the line).

For example, Burt's Bees used sampling to launch a new cosmetics line. From ratings and reviews, they found that customers had trouble picking a foundation shade to match their skin tone. They developed an online foundation shade finder tool in response, and within six months, cosmetics accounted for **more than 20%** of all sales on their e-commerce site.<sup>6</sup>

Even if reviews don't reveal major flaws, customer feedback can help you identify ways to improve existing products — or even create new ones.





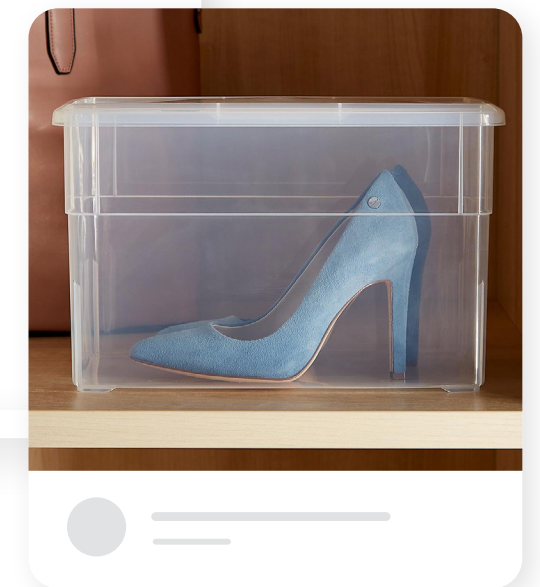
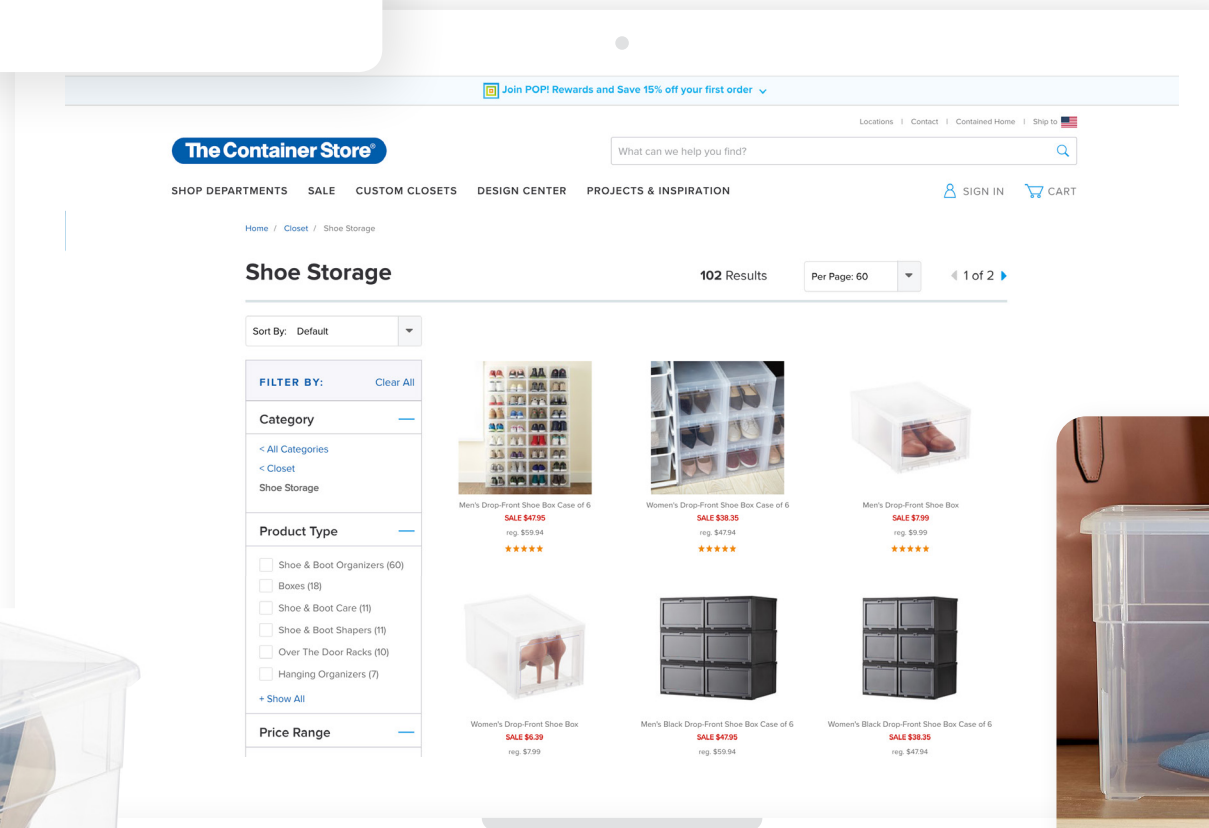


*This shoe box doesn't fit my high heels. It's not tall enough.*



By reading customer reviews, The Container Store uncovered a frequently expressed desire for their shoe boxes to be taller, so that high heels could be stored upright. They began offering a tall shoe box and saw an immediate positive response “by every metric imaginable,” according to their Consumer Content Manager Patrick Burk.<sup>7</sup>

When customers see that their feedback is heard and valued, they reward brands with loyalty. And when retailers see this kind of customer loyalty and engagement, it reinforces the value of putting your products on their shelves.



# Take UGC beyond the product page

Once companies have invested in collecting UGC, the next step is to make sure it is available for consumers whenever they need it. In addition to your own website and retailers' websites, UGC (review quotes, star ratings, and customer photos and videos) should be integrated throughout your marketing mix, including in-store, advertising campaigns, and social media. Our research showed that **66% of consumers are more likely to purchase a product if they see social media posts with content from real customers.**<sup>8</sup>

Bazaarvoice clients have seen the positive effects for themselves. Pet food brand Merrick reports consistently seeing more interaction with ads and social posts that include customer reviews than those that don't, leading to more than twice the return on ad spend.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Unilever sees a **20-30% improvement in performance of social ads and display ads when they include customer review content.**<sup>10</sup>

Broadening your brand's reach and recognition doesn't just help your business; it makes you a more attractive partner for retailers, too. And leveraging real, honest customer reviews and photos can help your marketing efforts strike a chord of transparency and trust that translates to real results.

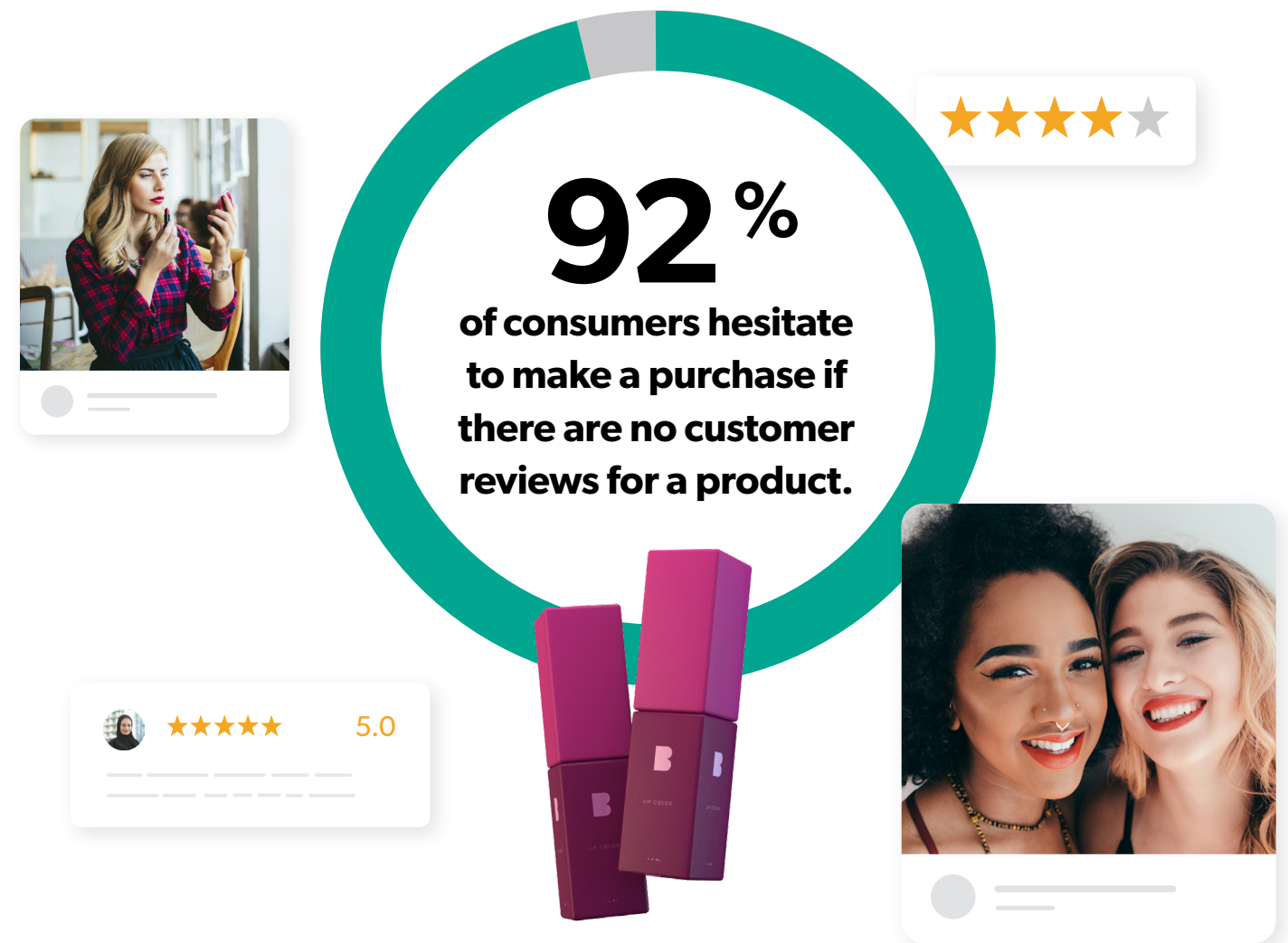


# The bottom line

There's no question: user-generated content is essential to the shopping journey. A recent survey reported that a staggering **92% of consumers hesitate to make a purchase if there are no customer reviews for a product**,<sup>11</sup> and retailers are well aware of this effect. UGC can help you build a win-win relationship with your retail partners, especially when you bring your own ratings and reviews to the table.

Even if you're starting from scratch, you can take some simple, straightforward steps to cultivate this competitive edge. Start by collecting user-generated ratings and reviews through a variety of tactics, from automated post-purchase requests to proactive sampling campaigns. Invest the time and effort to respond to customers to build stronger relationships and actively demonstrate your focus on customer satisfaction. Use consumer feedback as an opportunity to improve and seek out those insights as early and often as possible. And finally, don't overlook the power of UGC in your marketing and advertising efforts. Real, honest consumer content can connect with target customers where more traditional tactics fall flat.

With a solid volume of high-quality UGC, your brand's value to retailers increases exponentially, offering retail sites an infusion of fresh content and getting more eyes to your products. And most importantly, ratings and reviews deliver the fuel to move your products off retailers' shelves and into customers' shopping carts, where they become an indispensable tool for hitting sales and inventory goals — and fulfilling customer needs.



Ready to get started with a user-generated content program? **Talk to us** – we can help.

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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, and Australia. For more information, visit [www.bazaarvoice.com](http://www.bazaarvoice.com).



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