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*I could not wait to try out B's newest shampoo.  
After just the first use, I started to see...*



# Strategies for using product sampling to increase sales



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# Introduction

The modern shopper is a private eye in plainclothes, seeking out first-hand accounts of products and following the path wherever it goes.

Faced with an almost impossible number of choices, our private eye must be discerning and critical over everything from price to quality. The path? Unclear. The end result? Uncertain. But the shopper looks, reads reviews, pays attention to tip offs, and gathers insights in the quest for the perfect purchase.

From social media posts to ratings and reviews, sources are everywhere. But there are still times when the trail goes cold. These are the times when our private eye comes across products that show no signs of life. These are the yet-to-be-loved products, the products that have yet to stir up conversation or reviews.

So, our private eye moves on in search of products that stir excitement in others and inspire first-hand accounts of their experiences.

Not to worry, there's good news. There's a way for brands to keep the trail hot for new and old products alike: It's called product sampling.

# How reviews and consumer generated content impact your bottom line

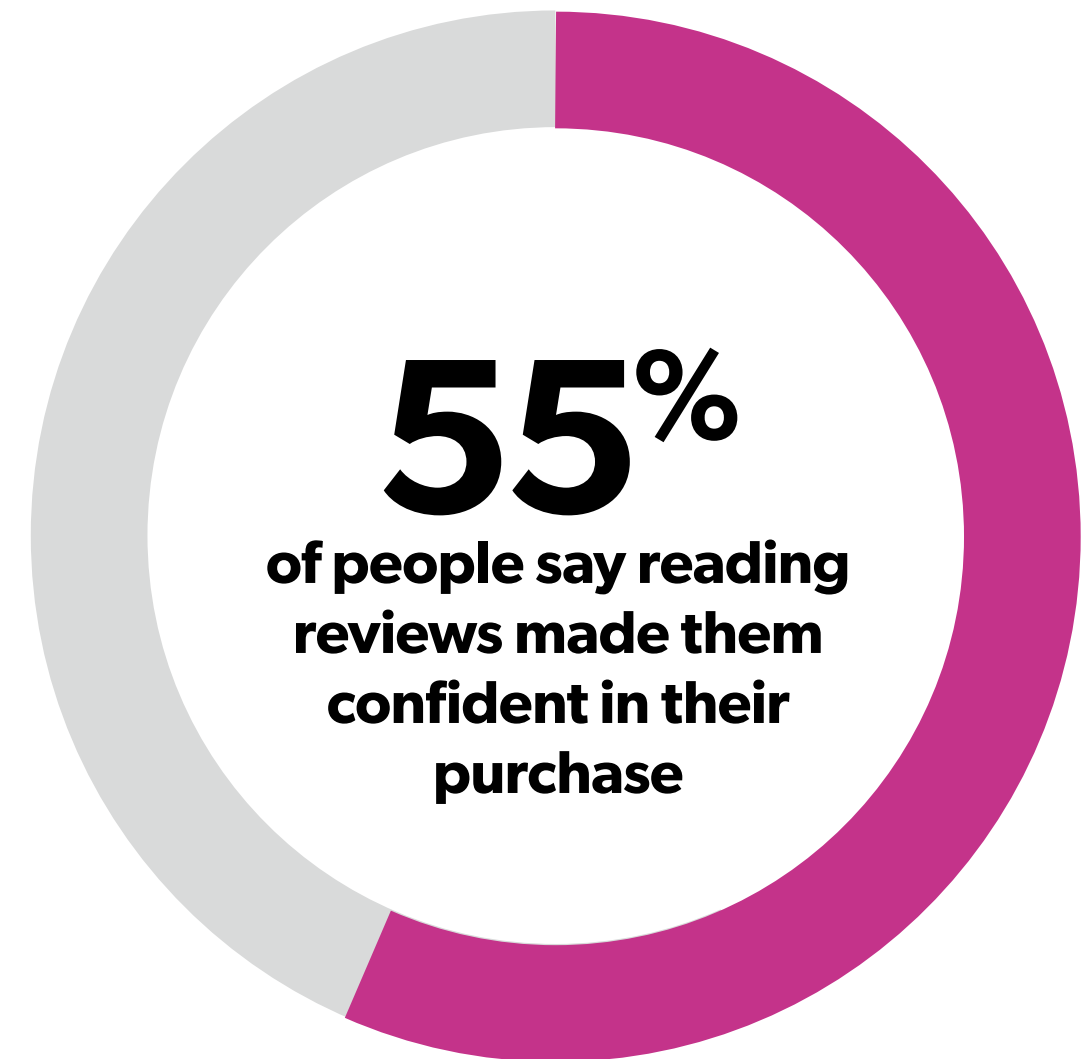
In a world rife with consumer-generated content (CGC) and product selections large enough to put your grandfather's old school catalog to shame, the modern shopper has countless resources to consult and sources to study, when making a purchase.

But there's an enduring constant despite all this change: People pay attention to what others say, think, and do. Today's shopper may not be 100% sure about what they want, but they almost always want to know what other people want.

Research backs this up. [A study from AdWeek](#)<sup>1</sup> found that 92% of people say word-of-mouth marketing played a significant role in their purchasing decisions. This extends to the online world: In a [recent study](#)<sup>2</sup>, we found that 20% of people say photos and videos from real people made them feel more confident when making purchases.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Consumer-generated content like ratings and reviews, social media posts, and visual content matters. And if you've got nothing there, shoppers are less likely to pay attention.



DON'T LET THE TRAIL GO COLD

# The modern shopper is investigating your product

Here's a fact: The average shopper researches 12 sources before making a purchase decision<sup>5</sup>. But if there aren't enough clues scattered across the right places at the right time, the trail to your product goes cold.

The best way to keep the trail hot?  
Put CGC in the right places.

In our annual [CGC Index](#)<sup>3</sup>, we found consumers who interacted with reviews and other consumer-generated content were 106% more likely to purchase from retailers and 90% more likely to purchase from brands. What's more, revenue per visitor went up 116% at retailers and 101% at brands with consumers who read reviews.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Reviews play a big role in purchasing decisions.

bazaarvoice:



# CGC plays an important role in keeping the trail hot, but there are still four major challenges for brands large and small.



## 1. NUMBER OF REVIEWS

**According to a recent study from BrightLocal**<sup>4</sup>, almost nine out of 10 consumers decide if they trust a business after reading 10 reviews. BrightLocal says “this number should be the benchmark ... [for businesses] to aim for so they appeal to a broad set of consumers.”



## 2. TIMING

Even if you hit BrightLocal’s benchmark for each of your offerings, they also note that 73% of consumers think that reviews older than three months are not relevant and 22% of consumers will only consider reviews written from the last two weeks.



## 3. NEW PRODUCTS

You already know products with ratings and reviews sell better, but new products don’t have customers yet, which means they also don’t have ratings and reviews yet. The bottom line: Shoppers are looking for reviews — because no one wants to be the guinea pig.



## 4. COMPETITION

Your product may have 10 reviews, but your competitor’s product has 20, and data shows consumers are more likely to go after the product with the most reviews. The bottom line: You don’t always have the luxury of time to let reviews trickle in organically.

# How product sampling drives reviews and sales

Getting reviews in the right place at the right time can be the difference between winning a new customer and losing them to the competition. And having good reviews in the right place at the right time can be just as vital to keeping the trail hot as our private eye investigates your wares.

But how can you make sure there are recent reviews for shoppers to read to learn more about your products?

The best trick is a tried and true method: Sampling your products to a select group of consumers.

Think about a grocery store or the perfume counter. You hand out a piece of pie or spritz someone with a bit of perfume in the hopes that they'll like it enough to buy some.

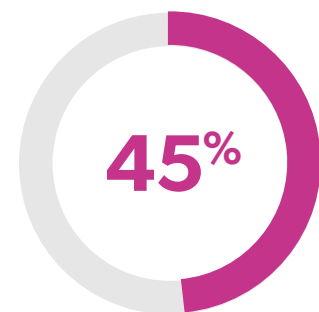


There's a reason people do this: It works. But where in-store sampling generally leads to just a single sale, online sampling campaigns go a step further. People can leave public ratings and reviews, sometimes going as far as posting pictures and videos on social media to talk about their experiences.

And suddenly, instead of a one-sample-to-one purchase, you're putting first-hand witnesses in a position to speak truth to our private eye (and every other shopper who comes across your product).

Need proof? **TIKI Brand**, the company that's synonymous with outdoor torches, found that visitors to [tikibrand.com](http://tikibrand.com) who read reviews are 24% more likely to buy online, and 60% more likely to click "Where to Buy."

Armed with that knowledge, TIKI leveraged product sampling to collect reviews for a new product before they launched it. Not only did 85% of customers who'd been invited to sample the new product follow through with submitting a review, but TIKI also saw the reviews as valuable sources for feedback for pre-launch product improvements.



45% of offline purchases are influenced by CGC

Bazaarvoice's 2017 CGC Index

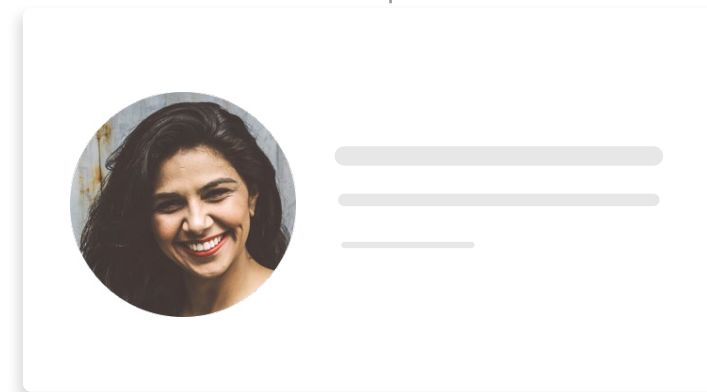
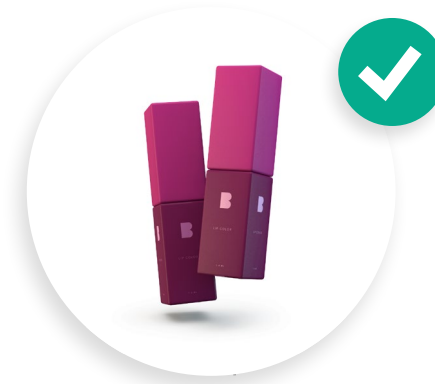


## Getting the right witnesses in the witness box

In the online world, it's pretty easy to tell good witnesses from bad witnesses: You've got the thought-out reviews that explain the whys, hows, and whats — and then you've got the one-line reviews that may or may not be dotted with a few typos here and there.

Brands have to be savvy if they want to get sampling done right. A big part of doing sampling right is making sure your samples get to the right people who are in your target audience and who care enough to follow through with a good review.

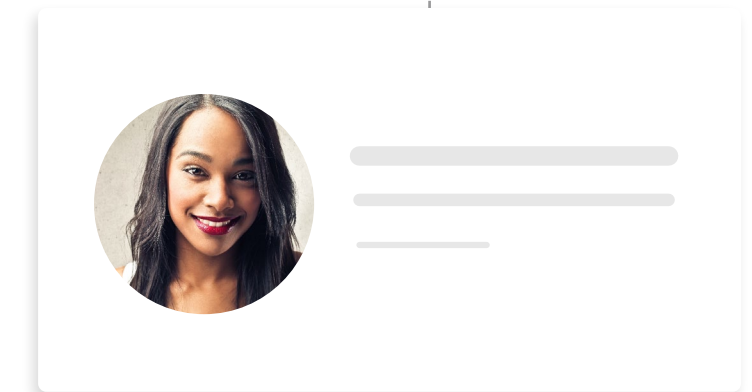
Case in point: Anyone can leave a review for a pair of running shoes or a new cleaning product — but are they people who understand and are interested in the product? Are they the kind of people who can give real feedback that's relevant to other shoppers?



### The right person to sample to:

#### LIKES

Your brand and products, like the one you're trying to ship



### The wrong person to sample to:

#### LIKES

Free things

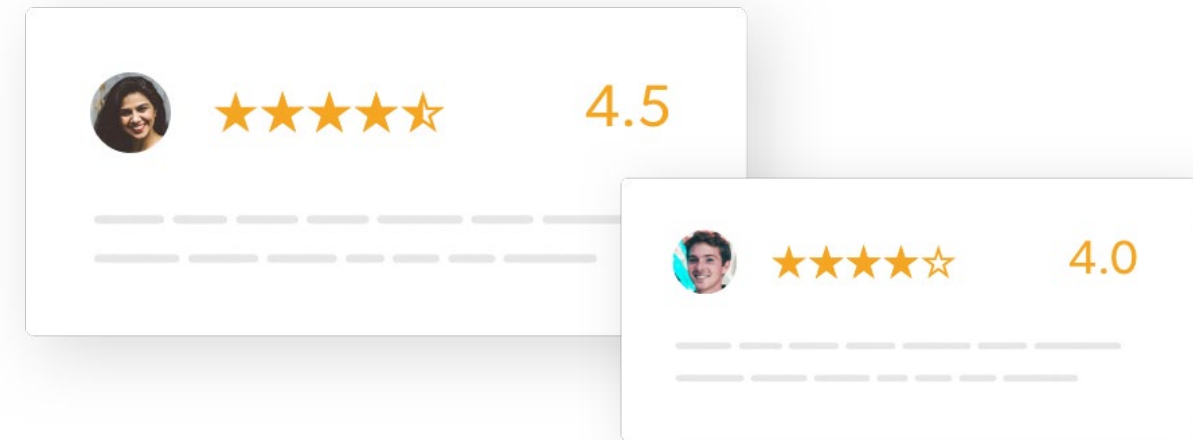
# How do you avoid sampling products out to the wrong people

## Sampling to your own community

Maybe you've already built your own community of customers and advocates. These are sources, advocates, and leads that are willing to get in front of our private eye and tell them everything about your brand. That's great. You've got a serious opening to turn them into even bigger fans by sending them a free sample in exchange for their feedback.

Reviews from these types of sources are exactly what our private eye wants to see. The more detailed the account, the better when it comes to our shopper's detective work.

This group is more likely than a random shopper to leave detailed, informative reviews about your product. In the end, you have a bigger fan than before who's positioning you to gain more customers in the long run with a well-penned review. That's what we call a win-win situation.



## Using online sampling services

But sometimes, you have the community of customers and advocates, but you don't have the know-how or expertise to manage a full-blown sampling program.

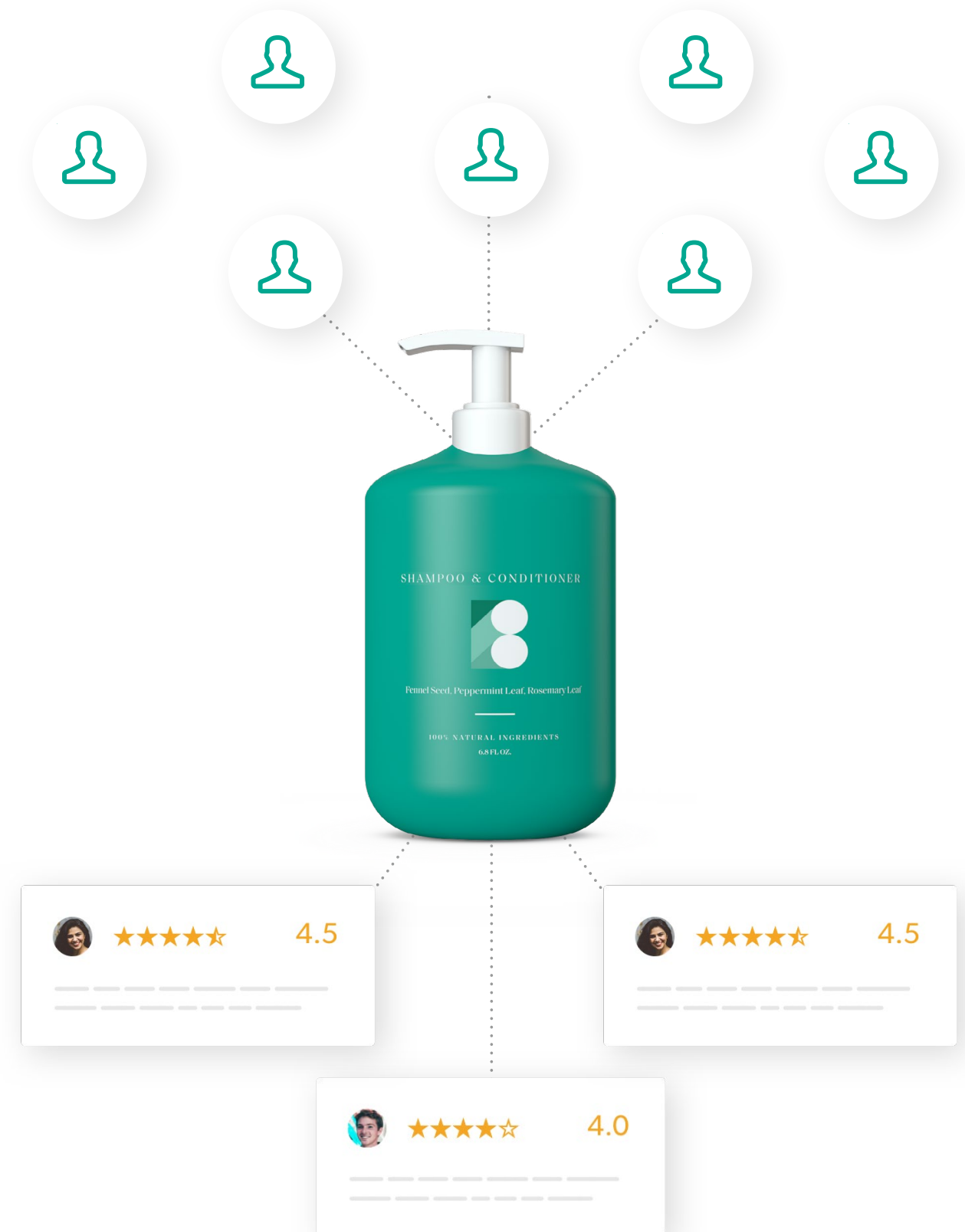
There are products and services out there to help you manage and capitalize on your own sampling program, such as Bazaarvoice's own **Brand Community Sampling**. These products and services are designed to make it easier for you to sample your products to a pre-existing group of past customers.

Here's how sampling services work: You give Bazaarvoice a list of people who have bought your products in the past, tell them what you want to sample, and then they do the rest. A quick Google search will yield lots of these products and services.

But not all products and services are created equal. **A good self-managed solution should do three things for you:**

1. Give you the means to quickly build a community of advocates.
2. Help you get your sample products out to the right people.
3. Get you quality reviews and social media content quickly.

Asking whether any service can do these three things is vital — but asking how they accomplish number two (getting your products to the right people) is crucial.

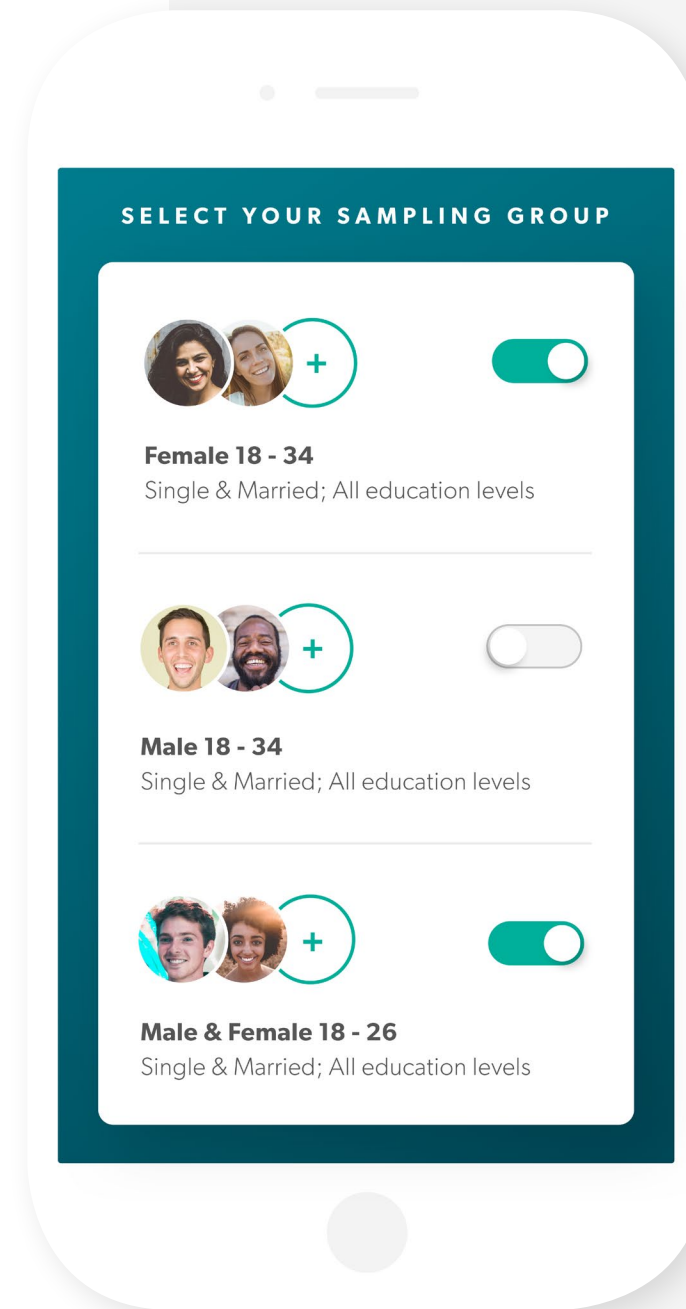


Think back to the free samples you're always seeing at the grocery store: For consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies, this type of play works.

But there's an underlying challenge: Brands and retailers have no idea if the people coming up to their sampling tables are actually interested in their products or, for that matter, in their target market. And as soon as the consumer walks away from their table, that brief relationship they had with the consumer is likely over.

In today's digital world, we have a few more tools at our disposal when it comes to targeting the right audiences. If your sampling service provider is good at what they do, they'll work with you to determine the best target audience and then recruit people that fit the bill.

But again, not all online sampling services are created equal. Some work with small pools of consumers, making true targeting a challenge. Others don't guarantee reviews or action on the end of the consumer you gave your product to. And still, others promise the ability to target specific audiences without being able to really deliver on those promises.



## Using Bazaarvoice Trylt

Then, of course, there's **Bazaarvoice Trylt**, which is completely managed by Bazaarvoice.

Leveraging Bazaarvoice's own vetted and carefully managed community, Trylt helps you find the right audience and get the feedback you need when you're preparing for a new product launch or goosing up an established product.

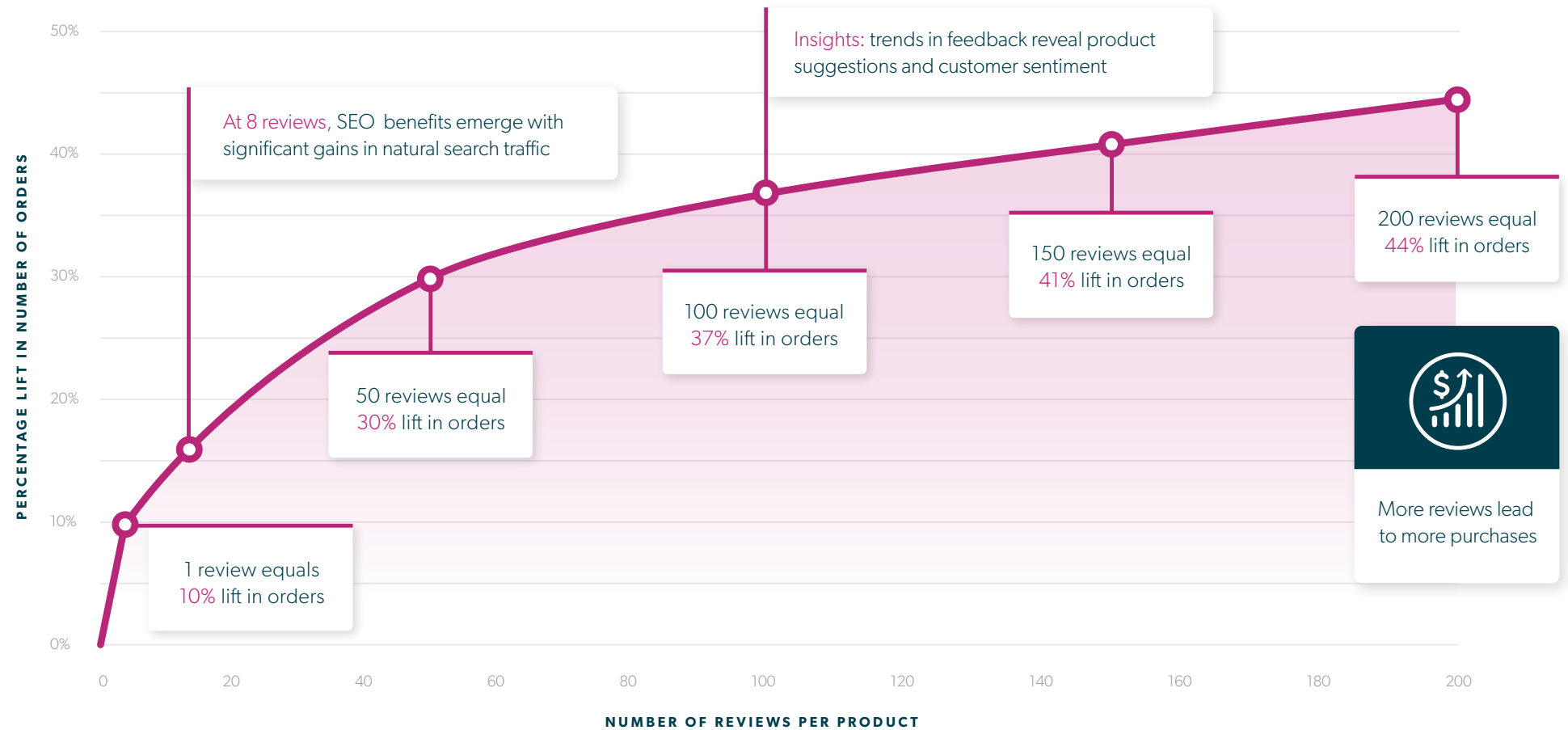
The best part: Bazaarvoice does the heavy lifting by collecting — and sorting through — the reviews and social mentions that come in.

And they do come in. With Trylt, businesses see an average response rate of 85-90% for every sample that's sent out. In other words, for every 50 samples you send out, you get up to 45 reviews in return. In our research, we've found that one review leads to an average 10% lift in conversion.

That means our private eye has more sources to consult with and a hotter trail to follow to your products. And it means you have a better chance of converting our private eye into a customer.

## The milestones you'll hit, by the numbers

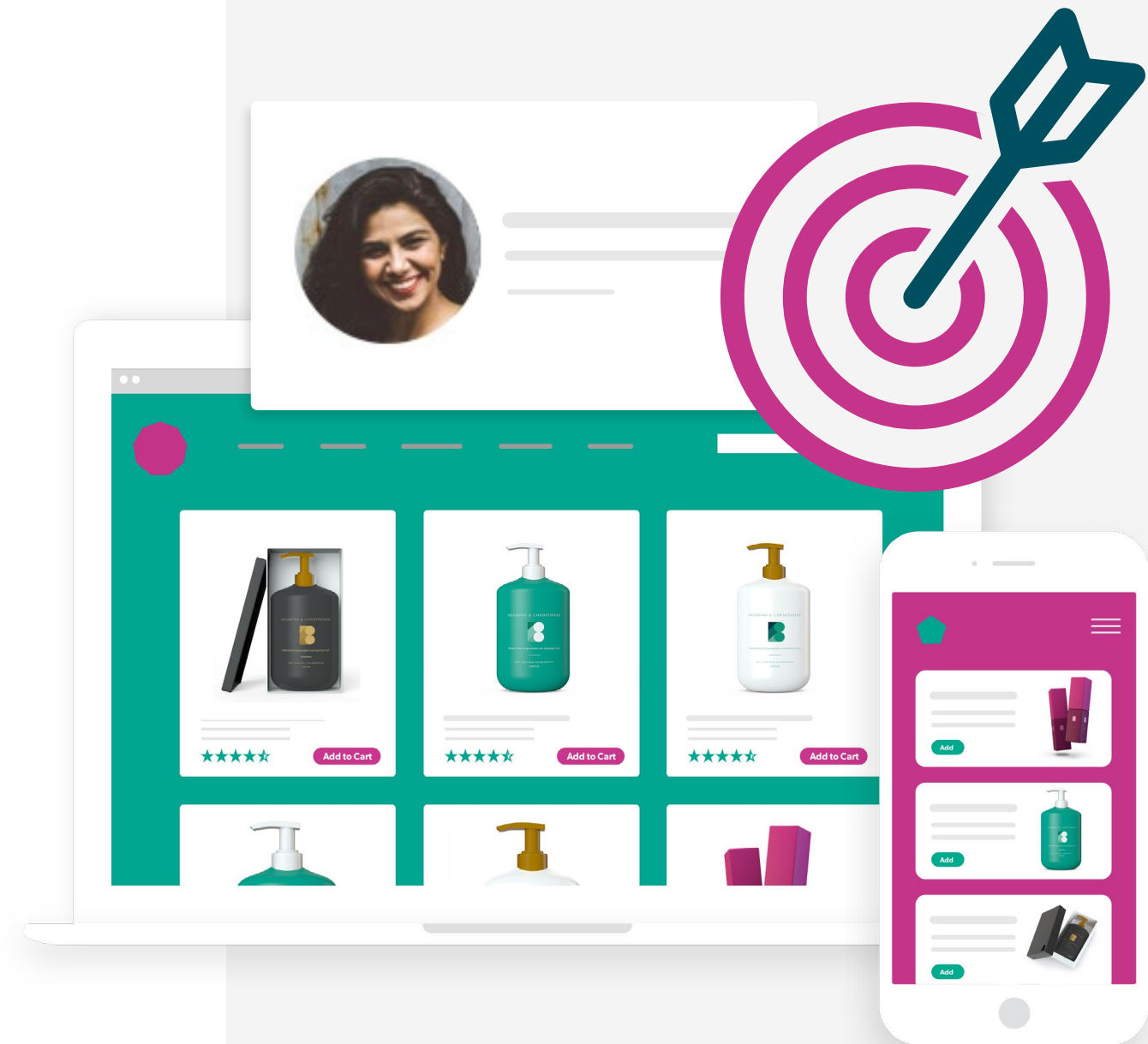
### AVERAGE REVIEW VOLUME MILESTONES



Trylt sees an average response rate of **85-90%**. This means you get more reviews when and where you need them.

# Fixing common problems for brands with product sampling

Earlier on, we outlined four large challenges for brands — the number of reviews, the timing of those reviews, launching new products, and competition from other brands. Any of those issues has the potential to throw our private eye off the trail. That, in part, was why we referred to these as “large” problems.



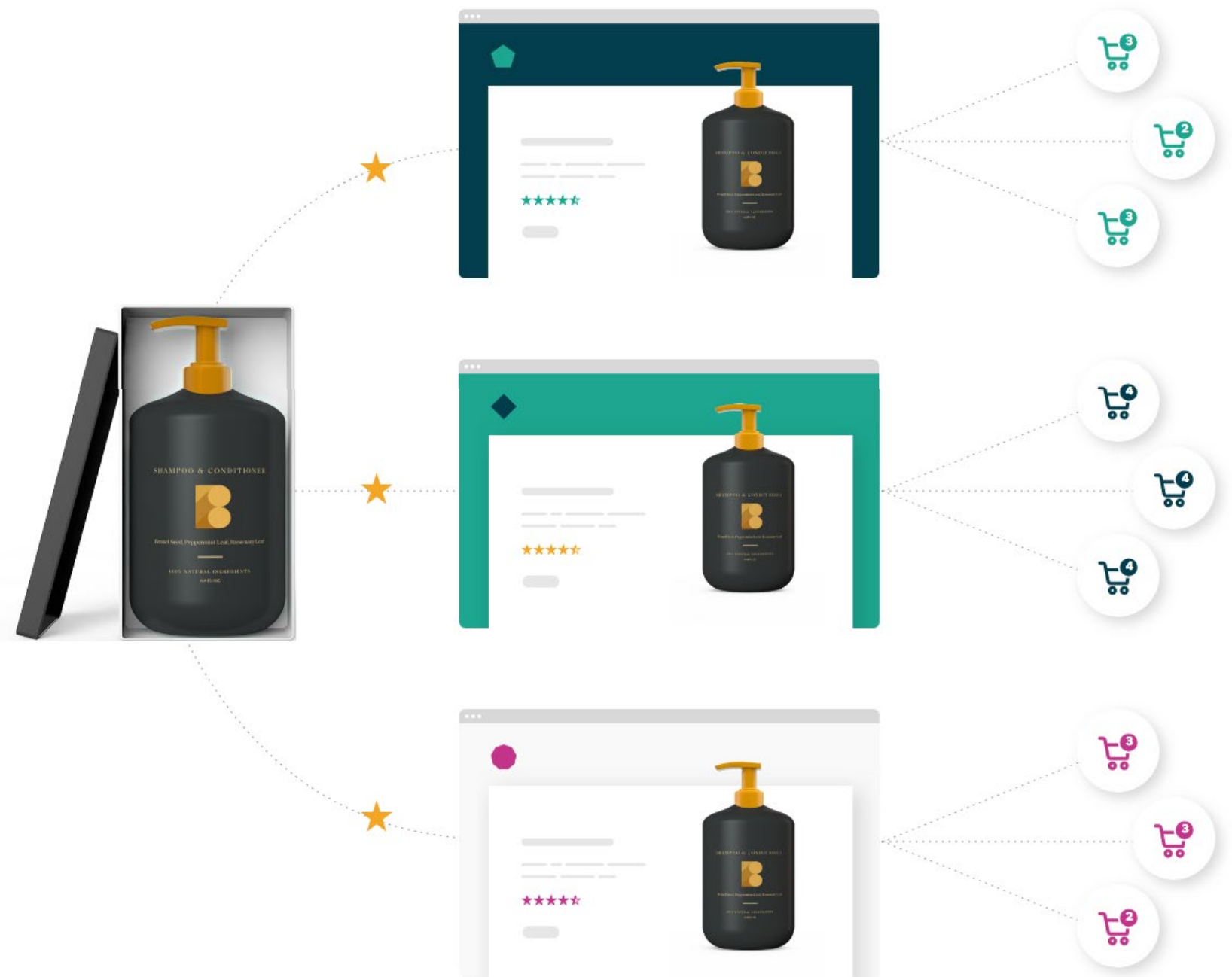
## How exactly can sampling your products to a target audience help address these four problems?

**1. Number of Reviews:** Sampling is proven to be one of the quickest and most reliable ways to boost your review volume and increase the amount of feedback you can collect from your users.

As noted earlier, The TryIt community sees an average response rate of 85-90%. As we mentioned before, this means that for every 50 samples you send out, you'll see as many as 45 new reviews. And that means a much hotter trail for our private eye during any present or future investigations.

**2. Timing:** We know from BrightLocal's study that consumers give greater weight to more recent reviews. So, if your product hasn't been reviewed in a while, you're likely missing out on a few sales. But there's good news: You can create strategic sampling campaigns to spread reviews out over time and ensure you keep new and fresh reviews rolling in. This simultaneously works to improve the SEO value of your product pages.

Let's put it this way: If our private eye comes across 30 reviews from the same day, things start to look a little fishy — after all, our private eye can read the writing on the wall. But with the right approach, you can spread those 30 reviews over a month or two and make things look a little more natural.



**3. Number Products:** Sampling a product before it launches can guarantee you launch with the information and first-hand accounts our private eye needs. We already know from A/B testing that one review can lift your conversion rates up to 10% and 50 reviews can lift your conversion rates up to 30%.

TTI Floor Care, the company behind brands like Hoover, Dirt Devil, and Oreck, knows this well. “As we launch new products, it’s a no-brainer that for every product we launch, we get them into [our] ... sampling program,” says **Jim Deitzel**, TTI’s Director of Digital Marketing. The results: Products launch with an average rating of 4.7 stars (and a plethora of reviews).

“When you start with more reviews and higher-quality reviews,” Deitzel says, “you start seeing more people buy, which leads to more good reviews, which in turn generates more sales.” So, that new product you’re about to launch? It’s going to do a lot better from the get-go if it has reviews present. And the best way to do that is sampling your products to your target audience in exchange for honest feedback.

**4. Competition:** Studies show that when your products have fewer reviews than a similar product from a competitor, consumers are less likely to choose your product. Put another way, do you think our private eye trusts the word of fewer sources over more sources? Exactly.

#### **BOTTOM LINE**

Sampling your products to strategically boost review volume can keep you ahead of the competition by keeping you relevant and in the conversation. And staying in the conversation is the name of the game.



*As we launch new products, it’s a no-brainer that for every product we launch, we get them into our sampling program.*

**Jim Deitzel**  
TTI Floor Care



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**Jim Deitzel**  
TTI Floor Care





# The bottom line

With reviews playing a huge role in the path to purchase, the modern shopper has become a detective, searching for firsthand accounts and finding sources. Whether you're launching a new product or trying to improve sales of an existing product, sampling is an excellent way to keep your products at the front of the conversation with relevant reviews and social mentions.

But it's crucial to ask the right questions before you settle on a sampling strategy. Maybe you're not sure how to go about targeting the right people. Or maybe you have questions about how to set up and manage your own community of advocates. Maybe you have simpler questions, like how many reviews it takes to see results.

Whatever it is, Bazaarvoice has a suite of options designed to help you out no matter how big or small your operation is. With the TryIt Community, we can help design your sampling campaigns from the ground up by targeting new users and managing the entire process. Or we can help you activate your own community of brand advocates with a custom Brand Sampling Community. We've done as much and more, and we have experience getting brands the results they want. Got any questions? We've got answers — let's talk.



[Contact Bazaarvoice](#) to find out.



# About Bazaarvoice

Bazaarvoice connects brands and retailers to consumers, so that every shopping experience feels personal. From search and discovery to purchase and advocacy, Bazaarvoice's solutions reach in-market shoppers, personalize their experiences, and give them the confidence to buy. Each month in the Bazaarvoice Network, more than 900 million consumers view and share authentic content including reviews, questions and answers, and social photos across 5,700 brand and retail websites. Across the network, Bazaarvoice captures 1.8 billion shopper signals monthly — data that powers high-efficiency digital advertising and personalization with unmatched relevance.

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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