The Conversation Index
Volume 8
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A network is greater than the sum of its parts

We’ve seen this hold true from the earliest social networks to the latest massive data sharing systems: today’s marketplace is a networked dialogue of information sharing between businesses and consumers – and the more effectively information is shared across these nodes, the better the relationship between all members.

In the eighth edition of *The Conversation Index*, we examine how businesses benefit when they are part of a network with other businesses and consumers alike. Bazaarvoice is a network of authentic opinions, questions, rich media, and experiences from over 500 million people globally – and the breadth of this network allows for powerful insights into the pulse of entire industries.

Read on to learn how sharing customer content across a network of retail and brand partners leads to better sales, insights, and search traffic – and why there’s no such thing as “enough” user-generated content.

On to the data,

Lisa Pearson (@lpearson)
Chief Marketing Officer, Bazaarvoice
What we’ve learned about user-generated content

Syndication can more than triple review volume.

Increasing review volume leads to higher conversion rates – even at high volume levels.

Fresh, product-specific review content drives search traffic and keyword rankings.

Three- and four-star reviews contain twice as many product suggestions as others.

Shoppers in the Asia-Pacific region show higher recommendation rates and sentiment.

UK shoppers rely more heavily on mobile than their American counterparts.
Syndication increases volume (and impact) of content across the network

The most obvious benefit of sharing user-generated content (UGC) across a network is that each member’s content volume increases. Across our network, businesses syndicate content to their vendors’ or channel partners’ sites.

This includes not only text content like reviews and Q&A, but also rich media like consumer-created photos and videos. Our own eye-tracking study found that 25 real shoppers looked at product images first, before any other product page content, without fail.¹ This is especially helpful in categories like jewelry; 18% of jewelry reviews include photos, the highest of any category in our network.

More participants in the web of sharing means more conversation. In many cases, a lot more. In the hardware industry for example, we saw that syndication accounted for a 259% increase in total content over native content alone. That means members of the network more than triple their review content when they choose to accept syndication. That translates to an 18% increase in product coverage.

A sample of pet supplies clients likewise showed a 121% increase in total reviews over native content due to syndication, and a 5% jump in product coverage. The consumer electronics category told a similar story, with a whopping 324% increase in content volume and 26% increase in product coverage. Department stores and sporting goods brands also saw lifts in both metrics.

¹ http://blog.bazaarvoice.com/2012/09/03/predicting-the-unpredictable-how-design-and-user-research-decodes-user-behavior/

“In social networks, the greater number of users with the service, the more valuable the service becomes to the community.”

– Robert Metcalfe, co-inventor of ethernet
THE SYNDICATION EFFECT

Syndicating customer content across the network leads to increases in total review volume and product coverage over native content alone, for all participating businesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Without syndication*</th>
<th>With syndication</th>
<th>Without syndication*</th>
<th>With syndication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer electronics</td>
<td></td>
<td>+324%</td>
<td>+26%</td>
<td>+77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td></td>
<td>+259%</td>
<td>+18%</td>
<td>+28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet supplies</td>
<td></td>
<td>+121%</td>
<td>+6%</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increase is median of sampled data by industry.

*Native content alone
Several forms of ROI manifest at different levels of review volume, extending beyond conversion increases to drive search traffic and reveal product improvement suggestions.

**Range: 1+ reviews**
- Increase in conversion is sharpest during early stages of volume growth.

**Range: 8+ reviews**
- Businesses begin to see significant gains in natural search traffic.

**Range: 100+ reviews**
- Trends in feedback reveal product suggestions and sentiment insights.
Increasing volume reveals UGC’s “Zones of ROI”

Syndication is the best driver of user-generated content (UGC) volume and coverage across a network. But why do these metrics matter? At a certain point, a product has more reviews, photos, and videos than any typical customer would care to wade through before making a decision. So what’s the benefit of all that extra content? Answering these questions requires seeing the bigger picture in UGC—the impact beyond increased conversion.

For those businesses new to gathering product reviews, conversion is the return on investment (ROI). That’s because the biggest leaps in sales come as a result of the first several reviews on a particular product. As products continue to build review volume over time, we’ve found that that conversion lift is just phase one of the cross-business benefit of UGC. Conversion is the first “Zone of ROI.” Conversion rates see a steep incline as reviews stack up, and continue showing incremental increases well past 1,000 reviews.

The second Zone of ROI is SEO benefit, which manifests as the first full page of reviews is collected (around eight reviews). The SEO value of fresh UGC continually grows stronger as volume increases, even into the several hundreds and thousands. This is because the dynamic nature of review and Q&A content is still highly relevant even at large volumes. We’ll explore SEO further in a later section.

The third Zone of ROI is product insights. This zone begins at around 100 reviews, once there’s enough content to extract product suggestions, flaws, and insights from the review text. Later, we’ll go deeper into the sorts of insights businesses can uncover.
ROI Zone #1: Across industries and regions, UGC increases conversion.

Across a variety of product categories (ranging from CPG to hardware to apparel), we’ve identified a positive relationship between the number of reviews a product has, and the number of orders placed on those products. Adding just one review to a product page results in a 10% lift in orders. We also see a median order increase of 25% on products that go from 0 reviews to 30 reviews, and that number jumps to a 37% lift in orders when going from 0 to 100 reviews.

The sharpest increase in orders occurs during the early stages of volume growth, the first Zone of ROI. But even at large volume levels, the more reviews, the better. Analysis of sales data across thousands of products and multiple product categories shows continued incremental revenue opportunity beyond 500 or even 1000 reviews per product.

So say, for instance, that 50 of a business’s products are receiving 1,000 orders per month with no reviews. By covering these products with 30 reviews apiece through syndication, the business could expect an added 250 monthly orders on those products – 12,500 more orders than before. Now, scale that example across all brands in the catalog, and imagine the associated revenue lift.

Put simply, more volume means more shoppers seeing reviews, which translates to higher revenue.

On average, product page visitors who interact with review content show...

+58% conversion rate
+62% revenue per visit
+3% average order value
...compared to those who do not interact with reviews.
MORE REVIEWS MEAN MORE ORDERS

No matter the industry, review volume shows a positive correlation with number of orders—even at very high volume levels.*

* Based on statistical modeling of transactional data from numerous product categories.

Early volume growth has an immediate impact on conversion.

MORE REVIEWS LEAD TO MORE PURCHASES
**DYNAMIC CONTENT BOOMS SEO**

Customer-written content keeps pages fresh and full of product-specific content—which drives search traffic.

Volume plays a critical role in the 5 “levers” of Google’s algorithms:

- **Content**
- **Markup**
- **Reputation**
- **Freshness**
- **User experience**

**Typical scenario:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duplicate template content</th>
<th>Static product content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Duplicate template example:**

- **HEADER, FOOTER**
  - 200 WORDS

**Static product example:**

- **PRODUCT DETAILS**
  - 150 WORDS

**Reviews offer a consistent stream of fresh content for your page. Search engines reward fresh, unique content with higher search results.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fresh review content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17% 13% 70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**800 WORDS OF REVIEW TEXT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4% 90%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**3,000 WORDS OF REVIEW TEXT**
ROI Zone #2: Dynamic content improves search traffic and ranking.

Search engines reward sites that stay fresh with valuable, relevant content – so from an SEO perspective, more is better. Google tends to exhibit five common themes as the motivations behind algorithm updates:

1. Content quality
2. Markup structure and efficiency
3. Reputation of a website and specific pages within that site
4. Freshness of content as perceived by the engine
5. User experience

In a normal, healthy product page, we often find about 100 words in both the header and footer markup, and 150 words of product description. This means that a typical product page without reviews contains only duplicate (57%) and static (43%) content. This makes for a stale page, and SEO experts know that search engines prefer pages with fresh, dynamic content.

Eight reviews will typically add about 800 words of UGC, taking the page up to about 1,150 total words, reducing duplicate template content to about 17% of the total. More important, it increases total product-specific content to about 83% of the page, 70% of which comes directly from the UGC (13% from the original description). And don’t forget the keyword benefits of site content written by consumers themselves, who use the same language (and misspellings) as their peers on search engines.

Once search engines crawl past the first page of reviews, each subsequent page includes up to 30 more product reviews – meaning about 90% unique content per page coming from fresh UGC. This patent-pending approach to pagination offers a better user experience and ensures that there are no duplicate content concerns. These pages contain so much diverse content that search engines continue to crawl and index; we’ve confirmed multiple cases where Google has crawled 200 pages deep into review pagination.
So, getting more reviews on a regular basis creates freshness and content diversity on the product page, and great depth of content to be indexed by search engines. We typically see a **15-25% increase in search traffic** that directly reach a product detail page. One pet supplies client recently saw a 28% increase in natural search traffic.²

In the Bazaarvoice network, increasing review volume offers added impact, thanks to our unique SEO solutions. For example, every new review increases the size of the pool from which our relevance algorithm selects top content, ensuring the most relevant content shows up first – which search engines reward. Additionally, as that pool swells, the number of relevant, long-tail phrases for the page increases exponentially.

Each new review is also a social trigger to search engines, improving the product or service’s reputation score. Search engines also detect the date that each new review is published, improving the site’s freshness score every time new content is discovered. And our solutions make sure review content is deployed with the schema.org markup requested by search engines – behind-the-scenes formatting that helps Google and other search engines more effectively crawl and index the content.

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ROI Zone #3: Higher UGC volume leads to better product insights.

Once enough reviews are present to constitute a reliable sample (about 100 reviews), businesses can use thematic and sentiment analysis to get a fuller understanding of what customers are really saying about their products. These trends in review text guide decisions across the business, from new product innovation to existing product improvements to effective marketing messages—all based on what customers themselves say they want. The more pieces of content available for analysis, the better the insights, making volume hugely important to creating a truly customer-centric business.

One method of gathering these insights is through moderation with content tagging. Moderators tag reviews that contain product suggestions or note flaws, and route them to the appropriate parts of the business. Generally favorable reviews are the most valuable, as 3 and 4 star reviews are more than twice as likely to contain product suggestions over reviews of any other rating. This illustrates that, while reviewers might be satisfied with the product overall, they’re still likely to offer recommendations for improvements that can help guide future iterations of the product.

In the toy industry, for example, satisfied doll buyers are still highly likely to offer ideas. “Dolls” are mentioned in 16% of all 4 star and higher reviews containing product suggestions or flaws, far surpassing any other topic in this positive, constructive feedback. By contrast, in toy reviews rated 3 stars or fewer, “plastic” is by far the most common theme—signaling that plastic (possibly durability) is a frequent pain point for parents buying toys.

These reviews are not only the most insightful for brands and retailers, but they’re also the most helpful to buyers. Reviews containing product suggestions and product flaws are statistically 2.5 times more likely to receive positive helpfulness votes from other shoppers over reviews without them. And 18% of 5-star reviews contain positive helpfulness votes, showing that these helpful reviews can sway shoppers to make the purchase decision.
DIFFERENT RATINGS CONTAIN DIFFERENT INSIGHTS

Both positive and negative reviews contain insights for improving products.

**Product flaws**
1-3-star reviews reveal a product’s shortcomings for improvement.

- 43% 2%
- 33% 4%
- 23% 5%

**Product suggestions**
3-4-star reviews offer the most suggestions for new products or features.

- 9% 5%
- 5% 2%

Reviews with flaws and suggestions are 2.5 times more likely to receive helpfulness votes than those without.
Authentic content yields reliable insights and promotes brand trust

No matter the ROI a business is after, the value of its customer content is unavoidably tied to its authenticity. Inauthentic content that doesn’t reflect the true views of real people degrades all of the benefits user-generated content (UGC) offers businesses.

The threat of inauthenticity degrades UGC’s value for consumers as well. Nearly half (48%) of consumers believe one or more of reviews displayed on a product page are fake. This mistrust damages the purchase influence UGC would normally possess; and worse, it can cloud the shopper’s ongoing trust in the business. So, in addition to the zones of ROI already discussed, authentic content also positively impacts overall consumer trust in a brand.

Networks support that trust. Connectivity structures in networks are crucial to understanding and protecting against fraudulent behavior. To distinguish complex fraud in the ecommerce space today, the most successful methods rely on a vast network of data to discern fraud patterns rather than the one or two most common distinguishing features. Given the increasing complexity and scale of fraud, the greater size of the network, the greater the ability to discern overarching trends and patterns enabling delivery of authentic content.

For the networks that do offer the scope to catch the evolving methods of fraud, members benefit from the collective authenticity of the network. The Bazaarvoice network, for example, offers a trust mark that outlines the network’s authenticity policy and identifies those businesses whose UGC collection and display methods meet the policy. And 44% of US consumers say they “would be more trusting of reviews” if presented with a trust mark.
This is especially important in certain regions where rating and review fraud is most common. For example, click-farming is a commonly recognized issue in the Asia-Pacific regions. Inauthentic businesses and overzealous agencies pay workers to submit 5 star review after 5 star review. Strict authenticity policies and fraud detection methods are needed in these regions to ensure the validity of content. In our network, for example, Asia-Pacific clients agree to strict terms and conditions prohibiting click-farming, and complex fraud detection is made possible by the size of the network.

Shoppers are more trusting of online reviews when they know the reviews are:

- monitored by a neutral third party (+81% more trusting)
- unaltered and unedited (+51%)
- passed through fraud detection technology (+49%)
- accompanied by an anti-fraud policy (+44%)
- not deleted for being negative (+46%)
Market-wide network exposes the pulse of entire industries

As a member of a robust network, businesses get useful insights not just into their own products and customers, but also into their category as a whole. Let’s dive deeper into a few product categories for examples.

**Pet supplies**

After analyzing data from several pet industry clients, it’s clear that pet owners feel very strongly about the products they buy for their pets, and that this is one of the most highly engaged industries. For example, post-purchase emails in the pet industry have a response rate that is 2 percentage points higher than the overall network average. Also, 13% of pet supply reviews include photos.

Additionally, this year, pet owners who actively interacted with reviews were on the site 137% longer than those who didn’t interact. This is even greater than the 99% increase seen across the overall network. Similarly, pageviews per visit for pet product shoppers are 94% greater for those shoppers interacting with reviews, beating out the network average of a 64% increase.

While both dog and cat owners are concerned with their pets’ health, reviews show the differences in food needs.
“Nutrition,” “digestion,” or “weight” are mentioned in 14% of cat food reviews, and in a favorable way (4.5 stars). And 12% mention “picky,” “finicky,” or “fussy,” also favorably (4.5 stars). In dog food reviews, on the other hand, 28% mention “healthy” and “coat” favorably together (4.9 stars). And 14% mention “allergies” or “allergy” favorably as well (4.9 stars).

Health and Beauty

Content tagging during moderation can also reveal trends. Our moderators tag reviews with product flaws or product suggestions, making it easy to route these notes to the product teams. And often these suggestions come packaged in positive reviews – the product is near perfect, with just a few things the user would like to change. In a sample of 4 and 5 star health and beauty reviews tagged with product flaw or product suggestion codes, “skin” was mentioned 28% of reviews, compared to only 3% in “eye shadow.” So, even for the best skin products, consumers have suggestions for improvements.

In less positive reviews (rated 3 stars or lower), “eyes” were mentioned in 16% of reviews, whereas “dry” or “oily skin” was mentioned only in 3%. “Shade” was mentioned in over 5% of these reviews coded PS, showing brands that reviewers have specific suggestions about the shading of their makeup.
In telecom, analysis of helpfulness voting shows an increased reliance on reviews among tech-critical consumers. Overall helpfulness votes have increased a full 31% year-over-year. But, helpfulness votes on positive reviews have actually decreased 10 percentage points (71% to 61%), indicating growing consumer criticism of mobile devices.

Enhancing review response programs could help convert those readers of negative reviews. Not all consumers have the same needs, so one person’s product cons may not matter to another. But brand responsiveness and service, on the other hand, appeals to everyone. We’ve found that seeing a brand response to a review made 41% of consumers think the brand “really cares about consumers,” and 35% thought the brand “has great customer service.” And most important, **shoppers who read a negative review and see a brand response are 116% more likely to purchase** the product than those who see no response from the business.³


**Digging into the actual review content is critical in understanding consumer sentiment and extracting the pros and cons of products.** For example, reviews of telecom devices on manufacturer sites contain valuable consumer insights into attributes like “battery life” or “screen size,” mentioned in 17% of reviews. Identifying the themes in positive and negative feedback allows brands to pinpoint areas to improve through R&D or play up in marketing campaigns.
Australia apparel review trends:

- 31% “fit”
- 24% “size”
- 23% “look”
- 22% “colour”
Asia-Pacific high on apparel, needs volume

Just as the network takes the pulse of industries, it also offers unique insights into the state of global regions.

Analysis reveals that the majority of Australian apparel reviews are coming from women (86%), and women ages 35-54 are writing 43% of reviews. These women are more positive than reviewers across the rest of the globe for the category: apparel reviews boast a 4.41 star average rating in Australia, compared to 4.29 at all apparel retailers in the network. The region also sees 4% more reviews rated 4 stars or more.

Australian apparel stores don’t see the same back-to-school peak as mass merchants. They do experience the holiday season peak, but it seems more shoppers may be buying apparel gifts for themselves during the after-holiday sales in January. Mass merchants see a large reviews spike during July (end-of-tax-year sales) and December-January (holiday sales). The December peak is higher than January, suggesting that gift-givers largely buy at department stores versus apparel-specific retailers.

Apparel and mass merchant reviews across the Asia-Pacific region as a whole boast fairly high recommendation rates, with 87% and 86% of reviewers respectively indicating that they’d recommend the product to a friend. Both categories lose out to consumer electronics, though (91%), and health and beauty reigns supreme at 93%.

That higher recommendation rate translates to higher sentiment in some parts of the region. For example, in Australia, shoppers leave slightly more 4 star reviews than the network average (+4%). These well-liked industries would all benefit from increases in volume; Australian health and beauty brands are only at 41% product coverage, compared to a 51% network-wide category average.
Global mobile traffic continues to climb

The breadth of the Bazaarvoice network allows us to see larger consumer trends across industries, such as global changes in mobile shopping. The percentage of product pageviews on a mobile device across the network grew 8% in the past year, globally. The Asia-Pacific region leads the pack in mobile views, with EMEA close behind.

Specifically, Singapore, Australia, and Japan are leaders, ahead of Korea and China. Mobile shopping has also risen 3-15% in various countries in the EU in the past year, with Turkey and Spain making the biggest jump at a 15% increase (from 18% to 33% year-over-year).

In the EU, France saw the smallest increase in mobile traffic, from 20% to 23% year-over-year. This may be due to the mobile saturation of the French market; these first movers are now leveling off in their mobile shopping. Overall, Poland has the smallest portion of shoppers coming from mobile at 17% (September 2014). For the same month, the UK had the highest percentage of product page traffic coming from a mobile device at 36%.

And in North America, mobile traffic for the year grew from 20% to 28% year-over-year. By country, Mexico saw the biggest increase in mobile traffic, up from 12% to 21% in 2014. But Canada (26% in 2014) and the US (28%) still lead for the continent, each seeing an eight percentage point increase. That growth still puts the US below the UK’s 36% mobile usage.
MOBILE STILL GROWING

Mobile review usage for shopping is on the rise, with product pageviews increasing **8% in the last year alone.** APAC consumers lead the pack in mobile usage.

**NOTABLE TRENDS**

**Asia-Pacific**
Australia’s mobile usage goes up during Christmastime, increasing (by 4%) in November and decreasing (also by 4%) in February.

**Europe**
The UK has the highest percentage of mobile usage in its region (**at 31%**), far ahead of the second highest: Italy and Spain (**at 22%**).

**North America**
The US remains the leader (**24%**), with Canada a very close second (**22%**) and Mexico much further behind (**15%**).
Conclusion

The benefits of UGC keep stacking up well past the thousandth review on a product. As content volume rises, so do sales, product and category insights and SEO benefits, among many others. Networks that share consumer-created content between members can achieve massive amounts of volume – and with it, better fraud protection, smarter industry and regional insights, and of course, higher ROI.
Methodology

The Conversation Index Volume 8 is based on an analysis of a sample dataset pulled from Bazaarvoice’s network, including data from over 57 million reviews and more than 35 billion product pageviews.

Contributors

Column Five Media created the visualizations for The Conversation Index Volume 8.

columnfivemedia.com
Contact us

Contact us to see how we help brands gain invaluable consumer and product insights by putting consumers’ conversations at the heart of their organizations.

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About Bazaarvoice

Bazaarvoice is a network that connects brands and retailers to the authentic voices of people where they shop. Each month, more than 500 million people view and share authentic opinions, questions, and experiences about tens of millions of products in the Bazaarvoice network. Our technology platform amplifies these voices into the places that influence purchase decisions. Network analytics help marketers and advertisers provide more engaging experiences that drive brand awareness, consideration, sales, and loyalty.

For more information visit Bazaarvoice.com, read the blog at Bazaarvoice.com/blog, and follow us at twitter.com/Bazaarvoice.

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