

COLUMNS

5 reasons why influencer marketing has emerged as today's go-to strategy

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By **Stacy DeBross**

From a just-released movie everyone says we have to see to that new restaurant our colleagues continuously rave about, we have all seen the power of influence in action.

When we hear passionate, first-person recommendations particularly from a multiplicity of surrounding voices we become more likely to listen and act on those recommendations.

Consumers now increasingly look to their trusted network of online influencers, as well as reviewers who speak in an authentic first-person voice, to share detailed accounts and storytelling around their product experiences.

As consumers consider a potential purchase, these recommendations resonate with them because of the power of each influencer's voice and the authenticity of what they have to share.

I have included here five ways that authentic online recommendations have forever transformed the marketing landscape setting the stage for influencer marketing to become today's go-to strategy:

Mobile connects consumers to online influencers: Consumers today feel a need to stay connected to online reviews and, according to a study we did on ecommerce reviews, 21 percent of women consumers say they most often check online reviews from their phone.

In addition, 70 percent of consumers say they sometimes/often/all of the time check online reviews from their phones while shopping. What is their reasoning?

Making the most of the family budget still resonates with consumers, so even as they remain poised to make a purchase, 35 percent still feel compelled to check their phone to see if they can find a better deal.

Moreover, as consumers weigh their options around a prospective spend, 33 percent say consulting an ecommerce review helps them come to a purchasing decision.

Consumers rely on online reviews for new products as well as old favorites: Overall, women consumers consider online reviews a key part of their purchasing strategy, as 92 percent say ecommerce reviews prove very/extremely important when making a purchase.

In fact, they turn to online recommendations when considering a product they have never purchased, as a full 96 percent of women consumers say online reviews are very/extremely important when buying from an unfamiliar brand.

Moreover, 78 percent of women consumers consider online reviews very/extremely influential even when buying a

product they know and like.

Online reviews factor heavily into consumer purchase research: Online reviews take the legwork and effort out of consumer research, as firsthand insights and experiences emerge at our fingertips.

Our survey revealed that consumers split 50/50 on whether they check online reviews for all purchases or just reviews for specific spends.

Consumers conduct online research among a wide variety of product categories, as 91 percent of women consumers say they check online reviews for home electronics, 88 percent research tech purchases specifically computers, tablets and smartphones and 87 percent research appliances.

In addition, 53 percent of women consumers say they check online reviews for toys and games, while 44 percent look to reviews for household products.

Current online recommendation culture sparks savvy consumers: In previous generations, consumers learned about products from top-down brand messaging.

Now, the thriving online recommendation culture has transformed not only how consumers learn about products but has also resulted in a new generation of savvy consumers.

Women consumers now view themselves as experienced discerners of online content, as 98 percent say they can always/most of the time tell if a reviewer is credible, 97 percent say they can always/most of the time tell if a reviewer is trustworthy, and 77 percent say they consider themselves extremely/very discerning when deciding to trust an online review.

Online recommendations transcend consumer groups: Finally, it may be tempting to think that online influencers and ecommerce reviews sway just the tech-savvy rising generations, but our research shows that today's recommendation culture transcends a variety of consumer groups.

We conducted a research study with Vibrant Nation of more than 600 women over the age of 45 and found that more than 95 percent of these women consumers seek out online reviews of products to receive feedback and first-person recommendations before making a purchase, 77 percent follow brands on Facebook, and 74 percent are more likely to purchase a product that receives a positive first-person review.

Similarly, another one of our studies focused on the millennial cohort revealed that this generation also looks to authentic recommendations to inform purchasing decisions, as 93 percent of millennials either always or sometimes read online reviews prior to buying a product, and 87 percent trust products after "doing their own research" involving heavy crowdsourcing among their peers.

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