



How to drive credibility, sales, and product ratings

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The Spiegel Research Center has partnered with online review platform [PowerReviews](#) to study which consumers write product reviews, why they post them, and how these factors are reflected in product ratings. As high ratings often drive high sales, understanding the factors involved is key to successful marketing.

[Yorgos Askalidis](#), the newest addition to Spiegel's [research team](#), joins the Spiegel Research Center with the research goal to help marketers and consumers experience reviews that are "more credible, trustworthy, and representative."

Askalidis' initial research findings illustrate key differences between reviews consumers leave unsolicited on a provider's web platform and reviews they post when prompted by emails from providers.

Reviews posted without prompting...

-Are often driven by strong reactions to a product. These reviews tend to be extremely positive or negative, and their average ratings fluctuate noticeably over time. Ratings can also be inflated by non-verified "customers" who may not have used the products themselves, but want it to succeed or fail.

-Create a self-perpetuating selection bias. In other words, moderately satisfied customers may be influenced by existing site reviews to post extreme reviews themselves.

While reviews prompted by reminder emails sellers send to customers ...

-Express more moderate reactions. These reviews often include more mid-range ratings than site-sourced reviews do. Not only do their overall product ratings tend to stay the same over time, but they are generally higher than web-based rating averages because fewer of their ratings are extremely low.

-Are written by verified customers--who are not likely influenced by previous reviews. Also, as these reviewers may not have posted at all without the email, they form a larger, more representative sample of the customer population than those who write reviews independently.

Altogether, it seems ratings and content from email-based reviews may reflect user's experience more accurately. Since they also lead to higher ratings, these reviews are also very likely, per the

Spiegel Center's body of research, to drive higher sales.

It's tempting for platforms to eliminate site-sourced review bias by only allowing customers who have received email invitations to review on the official platform. This can be hard to execute, though, as timing the email to product use is both essential and almost impossible to manage. Using only email-sourced reviews also removes the valuable insight that rawer, unsolicited reviews could provide.

This research is still ongoing, but Askalidis does have suggestions for marketers to leverage both types of reviews, maximizing their accuracy, power, and representative value.

-Incentivize Reviews - For Free: Both Amazon and Yelp give "stars" or badges to frequent verified reviewers, designating them as opinion-leaders. This reward costs nothing and incentivizes other verified customers to write their own reviews and achieve the same status.

-Show Verified Reviews the Default: Setting the review platform to show only verified reviews hides unverified reviews, but does not censor them. Site visitors can still choose for themselves which reviews they read.

Askalidis identifies this as the "nudge" approach, which leaves customers free to choose their content but "nudges" them toward the more credible choice. This "nudge" could be especially effective on today's savvy customers,

who may already believe verified reviews are the most trustworthy.

Both of these options, as well as other custom solutions marketers can create for unique businesses and goals, work toward the "more credible, trustworthy, representative reviews" the Spiegel Center is working to provide for the benefit of providers and consumers alike.