

# How to encourage, collect, and promote UGC to build brand communities

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If you've ever seen the show *Mad Men*, you'll likely have a good insight into just how much advertising has changed since the sixties. The vision and talent of Donald Draper, Creative Director of the fictional Manhattan advertising agency Sterling Cooper, was captivating. The show also delved into an era of marketing that relied on a "push" rather than "pull" strategy. For example, brands at the time invested big bucks into engaging ad agencies to push their message out to consumers through billboards, television ads, and radio commercials—a stark contrast to modern methods of pulling customers in via targeted, value-based messages.

In the days of *Mad Men*, high-budget, high-impact campaigns were designed to create a stir and get people talking. For example, the use of fear of missing out (FOMO) and social comparison tactics in a Smirnoff advertising campaign from this era plays on both intrigue and anxiety. "Haven't tried Smirnoff?" it reads. "Where in the world have you been?!" The ad also plays into the martini craze of the time, noting that the vodka "leaves you breathless", positioning it as an ideal choice for the classic cocktail. Ads like this paved the way for Smirnoff's success in the US and helped the company become the **best-selling vodka brand**.

Such campaigns have a beguiling power that gets people talking and reinforces the effect of **word-of-mouth marketing** (WOMM). This type of marketing nudges consumers to organically share their thoughts and experiences about products and brands.

Advertising has changed significantly since the sixties—and so has WOMM. However, brands and retailers have a new trick up their sleeves that builds on the power of WOMM. It's called user-generated content (UGC).

## What is UGC, and why should you use it?

Think of user-generated content (UGC) as WOMM for the digital age. UGC leverages original content created and published by your customers, including social media posts, photos, videos, blog posts, reviews, and published feedback. And it works.

Data from Statista shows that consumers scrolling to a point where they encountered UGC on a website had an increased likelihood of conversion by an average of 3.6%. Even more significantly, when those consumers interacted with UGC, they experienced a 102.4% increase in conversion.

UGC represents an enormous opportunity for online retailers—and adds value to shoppers across their entire buying journeys. Here are some of the primary reasons your brand should focus on UGC as part of your acquisition, conversion, and retention strategies.

### Demonstrating authenticity

Let's face it—the online shopping journey can be a minefield for inauthentic content. Consumers are often bombarded with internet advertising, email promotions, and website pop-ups that don't always hold relevance to them as individuals. It's no wonder that brand authenticity and values are now hugely influential during the online buying experience. McCrindle reports that 61% of Australian consumers say the authenticity of a brand is important to them, with 41% also saying they want brand values to align with them.

Is there anything more authentic than letting your customers tell your story? By focusing on UGC, retailers are sending a message: that they respect shoppers enough to provide an uncensored view of their brand—and trust them to make educated judgments.

### Building communities

There's a reason why Reddit has an estimated 12 billion monthly active users, with a forecasted 550 million posts published on the platform in 2024, which can be explained in one word: community. As one of the largest social media and online community platforms, Reddit is a prime example of how UGC builds communities. Users engage in discussions, share content, and vote on posts and comments. It's a formula that bypasses brand moderation and empowers users to share information and opinions in an open, honest forum.

Whether you're running a Facebook Group, a brand-specific forum, or encouraging comments and feedback on your brand's blog, UGC has the power to build robust communities.

### Creating social proof

Have you ever walked into a room and felt an overwhelmingly positive "mood" that added to the excitement of being there? That's the raw power of social proof. Humans are, after all, social creatures. We look to each other for cues and confidence about what to expect and how to react.

When we engage with UGC, we're again seeking that social proof and evaluating cues that help us form that proof. How do others feel about a product or brand? What were their experiences? Can I expect the same when buying from that online retailer? These are the questions that UGC can answer.

### Leveraging cost-effective channels

Spoiler alert: digital advertising spend is outpacing business growth. The IMF World Economic Outlook puts global growth projections at just 2.9% in 2024. On the flipside, digital advertising is expected to follow an upward trajectory to reach \$442.6 billion in 2024 at 6.5% growth, representing 58.8% of global advertising spend, as shown in the [dentasu Global Ad Spend Forecasts](#) report.

To bridge the gap between business growth and ad spend, retailers should consider exploring cost-effective solutions. UGC is one solution that doesn't need to cost the Earth to gain a whole new world of powerful, brand-building content. While some retailers engage paid influencers to create content, relying on customers and communities can still yield exceptional results.

## What motivates people to share opinions of a brand or product?

Derek Rucker, Marketing Professor at the Kellogg School of Management, explains in an article about the science behind word-of-mouth recommendations. "A prominent explanation is that word of mouth arises due to empathy or altruism. You can think of it as word of mouth being largely a result of people's desire to help others out." So, we want to help others because we know how being caught in ambivalence between different choices feels. Interestingly, though, an experiment discussed in the article suggests there may be more at play.

Researchers found that a group of participants within the experiment who felt a diminished sense of control were 20% more likely to give explicit advice about products than their in-control counterparts. Rucker says, "This work suggests word-of-mouth behavior can be shaped by motives beyond altruism and empathy. A need for control can lead people to shift from sharing opinions to giving advice."

While it may be some time before science provides all the answers to human motivations, the takeaway is that people want to create UGC. Whether for the good of others or the satisfaction of control, consumers are wanting and waiting to share their experiences, opinions, and advice.

## How to encourage and collect UGC

UGC comes in various forms, which means there are various ways to encourage and collect it from your shoppers. While there are always opportunities to get creative in driving customer feedback and content contribution, here are some of the top ways to get started.

### Monitor and motivate with social media

Pay close attention to social media platforms and unique hashtags or brand mentions that reveal the experiences and opinions of consumers. Liking, responding to, and sharing this content is a quick way to show shoppers your appreciation of their contributions while creating engagement and a sense of community.

Consider how you can motivate shoppers to create and share social content, such as offering discounts, early access to new products, running competitions, VIP memberships, and more. Sometimes, just highlighting that posts with your hashtag or social handle have a chance to be featured can be enough to get users contributing.

### Reach out for reviews and ratings—at the right time

Whether you're using tools like Google My Business, Yelp, REVIEWS.io, or YoPo reviews, the goal is the same: to collect customer feedback. However, it's critical to reach out at the right moment. Timing, as they say, is everything.

Are you likely to get the best feedback about your brand from a shopper who has just had a delayed or lost-in-transit delivery? Probably not. Likewise, if you're asking a shopper to review a product after they've submitted a return request or warranty claim, you might not get the most glowing response.

Before asking for reviews, check that your communication flows and automations incorporate data from the entire purchasing experience. Reach out at the right time to reap the rewards of positive reviews.

Additionally, pay close attention to customers who consistently provide positive feedback. They're prime candidates for specific testimonials that may further enhance your website and marketing materials.

### Incentivize through campaigns and contests

Who doesn't love to win? Help your customers get their running shoes on—by putting them in the running. Think about how to incentivize shoppers to send or share their content. Free products, giveaways, and cash prizes can create a buzz that gets content flying in.

When running a contest, be specific about the start and end dates, competition rules, who can participate, and how the winner will be picked and announced. Also, let consumers know the content type and format you're looking for, for example, unboxing videos or "how-to" tips that feature your products, to optimize the results.

### Go cross-channel with QR codes

While UGC belongs to the digital domain, there's no reason you can't get physical with it. By featuring QR codes on in-store advertising, banners, and promotional items, you can make it easy for shoppers to scan and submit their content.

You can also leverage QR codes to bring in-store traffic online. To keep customers aware and engaged with your digital presence, consider offering online-only specials and discounts to customers who submit their UGC via QR code.

## Promoting your UGC

You've done the hard work of encouraging and collecting UGC from your customers. Now what? As with any good marketing initiative, promotion is paramount. How effectively you amplify that content can mean the difference between grabbing attention or getting lost in the digital noise. Top ways to promote UGC include:

### Feature UGC on your social media channels

Re-share and repost user's content across your social accounts. It's a quick win for generating more social content and highlighting your shoppers' experiences with your brand.

### Include UGC in blog articles

Blogs are an integral part of many retailers' marketing strategies. Written content can inform and educate your audience and help move them along the path to purchase. Consider adding UGC, such as quotes, reviews, testimonials, photos, and videos, to add a touch of authenticity and human connection.

### Feature testimonials on your website

If you've reached out to customers for testimonials, consider where to place them on your website for the highest impact. For example, could you add a short quote to a product collection page that talks about that range from the customer's perspective? Perhaps a "wall of love" may be the better option for your brand to showcase multiple testimonials while keeping the shopping experience distraction-free. Or maybe featuring testimonials on your "About Us" page will add more weight to your brand story.

### Work with influencers

Working with influencers can be a fantastic way to expand the reach of your brand and tap into new audiences. They can also create the content to be shared, taking the hard work out of sifting through existing UGC.

Before reaching out to influencers, review your brand's goals, mission, and vision. You'll want to ensure you're working with influencers that complement your brand and align with its values. This alignment creates authenticity and shows your audience a logical, meaningful connection between the influencer and your brand.

### Add UGC to your ads

McKinsey data shows that 71% of consumers expect companies to deliver personalized interactions, and 76% become frustrated when that doesn't happen. Do your ads feel personal? If not, consider how you can leverage UGC to make your advertising more authentic and relatable. Images, videos, and quotes from real customers using your products can sometimes tell your brand story more effectively than even the most carefully crafted ad.

## How UGC affects the post-purchase experience

UGC can not only influence purchase behaviors but also create better experiences after the sale. Post-purchase dissonance is the feeling shoppers get when they're unsatisfied or uneasy after making a purchase. This phenomenon is driven by emotions that arise when expectations mismatch with an actual outcome. For example, what a shopper expects from an online retailer and their products and what they end up receiving.

There are several reasons why post-purchase dissonance can occur, including poor product quality, a lack of adequate communication after the sale, customer service that doesn't quite hit the mark, and even impulsive purchase behaviors from shoppers.

However, UGC can help close the gap on post-purchase dissonance. How?

By including product reviews and ratings on product display pages (PDPs), you can give shoppers a better "feel" for product specifics, use cases, and quality. Think about allowing shoppers to add images and videos to their product reviews to give others a more tangible sense of what to expect.

Many retailers also embed social media carousels on their websites with UGC that showcases products and highlights the real-world connection with customers.

Keep your shoppers' expectations real—by sharing real content—and leave your customers feeling positive after the checkout.

## UGC is a goldmine waiting to be explored

Retailers are no longer reliant on high-budget, high-impact campaigns, as they were in the days of *Mad Men*, to get people talking about their products and brand.

UGC is a goldmine waiting to be explored. It's helping brands demonstrate their authenticity, build communities, and create compelling social proof—all in cost-effective ways.

Equipped with the tactics to encourage, collect, and promote your UGC, it's now time to implement and measure which UGC avenues work best for your brand.

Ready to optimize conversions across your ecommerce site? Check out our in-depth [CRO guide](#) to get started!

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