Customer reviews: The not-so-secret SEO tactic



No matter what industry you're in or what your business does, you want to be as close as possible to the top of a search engine results page (SERP).

And of course, SEO is what gets you there, taking into consideration more than 200 ranking signals, such as the quality of your content, backlinks, mobile optimization, and keywords.

While these traditional SEO tactics have dominated strategies since the formation of Google, customer reviews are another ranking signal hot on their heels, now making up 7% of Moz's localized organic ranking factors. Reviews provide search marketers with a huge opportunity to go above and beyond. But how do they enhance SEO?

You could say that customer reviews piggyback on one of the most important ranking factors: the 'freshness' of your website content.

By providing your business with a continuous supply of fresh, unique user-generated content (UGC), webcrawlers know your site is active, driving your website listing higher, achieving Google organic stars, and increasing website conversions.

Content produced in association with Feefo.

Obtaining organic stars

But just having reviews isn't enough. Ideally, your business should show Google organic stars, the recognizable rich snippets that help your website stand out in search listings. These stars have been proven to increase click-through rate

(CTR) by up to 30%, according to Search Engine Land.

In order to achieve that seal of Google approval when hosting third-party reviews on your website, it must be marked-up appropriately with the correct schema: code that helps algorithms return more informative results about websites. There are three key types, focused on homepages, specific products and a business' individual locations.

Coupled with the right schema, your reviews could also appear in Google's Knowledge Panel the box that appears on the right of search results with relevant business information.



So even if you have reviews, you still won't show those stars without the correct schema markup on your website.

Fighting fake reviews

Reviews may add credibility, but what if they're fake? It's not uncommon to see fraudulent review-writing services advertised, despite crackdowns (and lawsuits) against prolific offenders.

Consumers are practical; they know that nothing is truly perfect and are skeptical of products and services with uniformly positive feedback. Often believing five-star reviews may be too good to be true, people are more likely to be influenced by ratings between 4.2 and 4.5 out of 5, according to GetApp.

Invitation-only platforms negate the threat of fake reviews by only soliciting them from genuine customers who have purchased products from their clients, rather than leaving it open for anyone to leave a review. When people know that your reviews have all been left by genuine customers, the power of that relationship will help you build confidence and sales.

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Most people factor online reviews into their buying process. According to Fan and Fuel research from December 2016, 92% of consumers hesitate to make a purchase if a product doesn’t have any reviews. Similarly, BrightLocal found that 88% of consumers trust online reviews just as much as recommendations from people they know.

Word of mouth certainly holds weight, but seeing online reviews generally comes across as more varied and impartial, granting them equal value. Any way you look at it, people trust people.

That trust increases confidence, which often comes with more traffic and more more sales. Since HomeFuels Direct, an oil and gas company based in Northern England, started displaying organic stars on their website, sales have increased by 69% year-over-year.



And it’s not just positive reviews that help. Reviews are obviously powerful for SEO, but something many marketers don’t realize is that negative reviews can be just as beneficial in contributing to consumer trust.

Volume and variety counts for a lot. Displaying positive and negative reviews shows you have nothing to hide. The positive reviews speak for themselves, while those that are negative provide a great opportunity to show off your customer service skills.

Giving consumers a transparent view of the way you handle negative feedback can certainly endear your business to them. In a world where everything is getting more automated by the day, that personal touch really adds to your overall value.



To sum up

Consumers today have literally all the choice in the world, which makes the need for transparency to help your business stand out against competitors that much more important.

Collected and displayed correctly, and coupled with the correct schema, your business can use reviews as a fundamental SEO tactic and a means to show Google organic stars. Most importantly, reviews can be influential in building trust with your customers, reassuring them that they can buy through you, with confidence.

To further understand how verified feedback will help you obtain organic stars, improve CTR and increase sales, read Feefo's report: Improve search engine performance with ratings and reviews.

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