POWER
REVIEWS

The Definitive Guide to Product Sampling

—

A step-by-step guide to planning and executing a product sampling campaign that yields conversion-boosting UGC

Boosting Sales Performance with Product Sampling

The concept of product sampling isn't new. Industries including health and beauty and food and beverage have been using product sampling for a long time as a way to increase trial and boost sales.

You probably have first-hand experience with this type of product sampling as a consumer. Perhaps you tried a new granola bar in a grocery store or received a tiny vial of perfume at a beauty store. In some cases, you may have loved the product enough to buy the full size version.

Product sampling can be a great way to get people to try a product they may not have otherwise. But that's not the only use case for product sampling.

It's also a fast, simple and proven way for brands across all product categories to generate more ratings, reviews and other user-generated content. And generating this content has never been more important, as the majority of consumers depend on it to make informed purchase decisions, regardless of what they're shopping for.

But how does product sampling work? And what can you do to ensure you're getting the most ROI from your product sampling campaigns?

In this guide, we'll explore everything you need to know about product sampling. We'll start by discussing why reviews matter and how product sampling can help you generate more. Then, we'll take an in-depth look at the nine steps you need to take to execute a successful product sampling campaign that generates a high volume of product reviews.

Why Reviews Matter

Before we dive into the nuts and bolts of product sampling, let's take a step back and examine why reviews matter in the first place.

97%

of consumers consult product reviews

26%
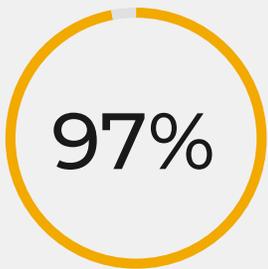
of consumers consult reviews for every online purchase

Shoppers Depend on Reviews

In the past, when a shopper was in the market for a new product, they'd ask their family and friends for recommendations. But increasingly, shoppers seek out opinions of others like them by reading reviews.

PowerReviews research found that nearly all (97%) of consumers consult product reviews prior to making a purchase. And of those shoppers, 26% consult reviews for every single purchase they make online.

What's the risk of not collecting and displaying this content? Shoppers will go elsewhere. Our research found that 70% of shoppers will go to a search engine or Amazon if they can't find reviews (or enough reviews) on a brand or retailer's site. And once they've left your site, they're unlikely to return.
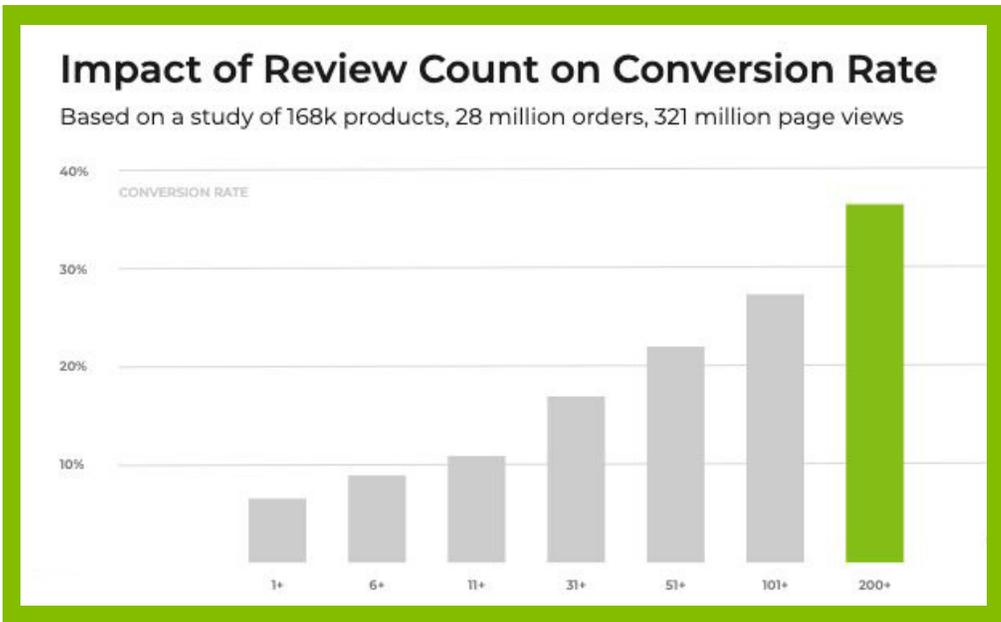
> *Reviews are just table stakes now. If you want to sell online, you have to have them — and the more the better.*

SUCHARITA KODALI
PRINCIPAL ANALYST, FORRESTER

Reviews Grow Sales

The good news is, ratings and reviews are also beneficial to brands. This content is proven to impact the bottom line by boosting traffic, conversion and sales. And as the data shows, the greater the number of reviews, the greater the impact.

Impact of Review Count on Conversion Rate
Based on a study of 168k products, 28 million orders, 321 million page views

Of course, there are many quantifiable benefits to collecting and displaying ratings and reviews. But there are also benefits that can't be quantified. Namely, reviews provide brands with powerful, actionable data and insights that can help them provide even better products and customer experiences. Clearly, ratings and reviews are a win-win for consumers and brands alike.

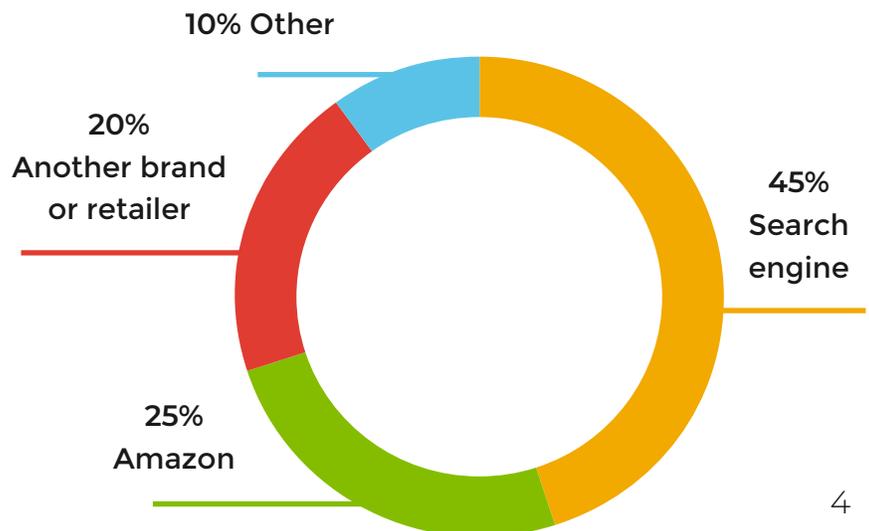**Product pages with at least 1 review generate:**

108%
more traffic

65%
higher conversion

92%
sales lift

Reviews Make or Break the Site Experience

Where do shoppers go if they can't find reviews (or enough reviews)?

10% Other

20% Another brand or retailer

45% Search engine

25% Amazon

4

How Product Sampling Generates Reviews

Reviews have a significant impact on shopping behavior and - most importantly - drive product sales. So it's not surprising that innovative, customer-centric brands are always on the lookout for ways to generate more of this conversion-boosting content.

That's where product sampling comes in.

Essentially, product sampling involves sending a free sample of a product to a consumer, in exchange for their honest feedback. They share this feedback by submitting a product review.

Product sampling is proven to yield a significant number of reviews. On average, PowerReviews clients see a 86% completion rate from product sampling campaigns. Brands and retailers that employ best practices often see even better results. When you hear the phrase "product sampling," you might think of small, low cost items. But don't let that thought limit you. PowerReviews has executed successful sampling campaigns for much higher consideration products, from luxury makeup and robotic vacuums to even mattresses.

On average, PowerReviews clients generate a

86% completion rate

from product sampling campaigns,

the highest in the industry.

When to Consider
Product Sampling

We know reviews are an expected part of the purchase journey and deliver significant benefits for both consumers and brands. And we know that product sampling can help generate more of this content.

So when should you consider a product sampling campaign?

From our experience, we've found that product sampling is especially effective in these four instances.

When You're Launching a New Product

(or an Entire Product Line)

Our [research with Northwestern University](#) found that reviews are especially impactful for new products. Why? Because there's a level of risk involved with purchasing an unknown product.

Reviews help mitigate that risk and give shoppers the confidence they need to purchase new products they have no prior experience with. Case in point? Our research found that 72% of online grocery shoppers indicate they are more likely to purchase a grocery item they've never purchased before if there are reviews for that product. This is the case for other product categories, too.

But how do you generate those first reviews that'll give future shoppers the confidence they need to convert? Through product sampling. That way, as soon as the product detail page goes live, you'll have plenty of reviews already available.

Why is this worth the time and expense? This content will accelerate your product launch and drive sales. To capture 50, 100, or 200 reviews organically is likely to take months or maybe even longer depending on your traffic levels. But — with a sampling campaign — you will be at this volume from day one.

As an added bonus, the reviews you get for new products are full of insights that can help you improve future versions of these products.

When You Need to Fill in Content Gaps

You most likely have existing products that are in need of review content. A common problem we see is that brands may have products with high traffic levels but low conversion rates.

As we mentioned before, shoppers are likely to leave a brand or retailer site if they can't find any (or enough) reviews for a product. So generating reviews for these key products can have a big impact on sales. Consider executing product sampling campaigns to fill in those content gaps. These campaigns will yield content that'll provide future shoppers with social proof so they're more likely to convert.

When You Need to Keep Reviews Fresh

You may have plenty of reviews for your key products. But have you taken a look at how fresh the content is? When shoppers read reviews, they want to find content that's relevant — and recent. If a review is too old, shoppers are likely to disregard it altogether. Consider running sampling programs for existing products on a regular basis — for example quarterly or bi-yearly — to ensure shoppers can always find fresh reviews for your key products.

Remember too: **search engines love fresh content.** So a steady stream of new, relevant review content also helps your product pages rank higher on search engine results pages. And that means you'll get a healthy traffic boost, too.

According to Google, ads with Customer Ratings get a 17% higher Click Through Rate than the same ads without ratings.

> " *You never want a customer to leave your website, hoping to find the information they need somewhere else. Customer content builds confidence, and PowerReviews has allowed us to showcase that social proof on our site, facilitating the path to purchase for our customers.* "

DENA CHILDS

ECOMMERCE MANAGER, WEBS AMERICA'S YARN STORE

When You Have a Seasonal Product and You Need to Generate Reviews Fast

Many brands sell seasonal products that are only available for a limited time. For example, a cosmetic brand may offer a makeup gift set — but only during the holiday season. Or a food brand might sell gourmet chocolate Easter eggs — but only for a limited time. **It's important to generate reviews for these seasonal products quickly before peak sales periods.**

Product sampling makes that possible. If you sell a seasonal product, consider a pre-season sampling campaign. That way, there will be plenty of reviews available when consumers start actively shopping for it.

8 out of 10 millennials will never buy anything without reading a review first.

84%

of millennials don't trust traditional advertising.

52%

of millennials trust influencers less than they used to

9 Steps to Outcome-Driven Product Sampling Campaigns

Product sampling campaigns can generate a large number of conversion-boosting content. But not all campaigns are created equal. Here are nine steps to take to plan and execute a product sampling campaign that yields the greatest ROI.

STEP 1:
Establish Your Goals

The first step of a product sampling campaign is to establish your goals. In other words, think about what you want to accomplish with product sampling.

For example, perhaps you're a cosmetic company looking to generate 500 reviews for a new, hero product you're launching next season. Or maybe you've identified 10 existing products with high traffic and low conversion that need fresh, recent reviews. You may decide to send 100 samples of each of these targeted products.

The goals you establish at the beginning will drive everything else that follows.

STEP 2:
Determine How Many Samples You'll Send

One of the most common questions we get from clients is "how many samples should we send?" And the answer is that it depends.

Your sampling goals and budget will determine how many samples you should send in any given campaign. Many brands look to their closest competitors — referencing how many ratings and reviews they have on their products - when defining their goals.

Keep in mind that around 86% of consumers will write reviews for samples they receive (if leveraging the PowerReviews sampling community and methodologies). So if you want to generate 500 reviews for a new, hero product, you'll need to send out at least 582 samples.

Target Your Audience Effectively

Sending product samples to a random group of your customers isn't effective. Instead, you'll want to make sure the people who receive your samples are part of your ideal target audience - and are eager to provide review content. For example, if you're doing a product sampling campaign for an infant car seat, you'll want to ensure recipients have children under the age of one. This will ensure higher engagement and review collection rates.

Send a survey to all potential product samplers with targeted questions. For example, if you're sending a cosmetic sample, you might ask if the person wears makeup in the first place. If they don't, they're unlikely to be interested in your product — and they probably won't write a review.

You'll also want to verify addresses for potential samplers so your products are delivered to the right place.

Working with a product sampling vendor is the best way to ensure your samples get into the right hands. These businesses are dedicated to cultivating large databases of everyday influencers that represent a wide range of demographics. They've also got a lot of experience targeting specific customer personas and can help ensure your products go to shoppers that meet specific criteria.

Distribute Your Products

Once you've identified your audience, it's time to distribute your samples. Of course, the package a shopper receives will look different depending on the product they receive. But there are a couple of common components of all product sampling packages. Of course, you'll need to include the product itself. It's a best practice to include a full size version, rather than a trial size, to give samplers plenty of experience of your product to share a fully informed opinion. Include any special instructions for using the product, too.

You'll also want to include a welcome letter in the package that thanks the consumer for being part of the program. This letter should also remind them to write a product review and provide instructions for how to do so.

If you prefer to enhance the packaging with additional content or fancy-looking extras, that is something to consider. However, this is actually proven to have little impact on whether consumers write a review or not. Remember, that is the main goal of any sampling campaign.
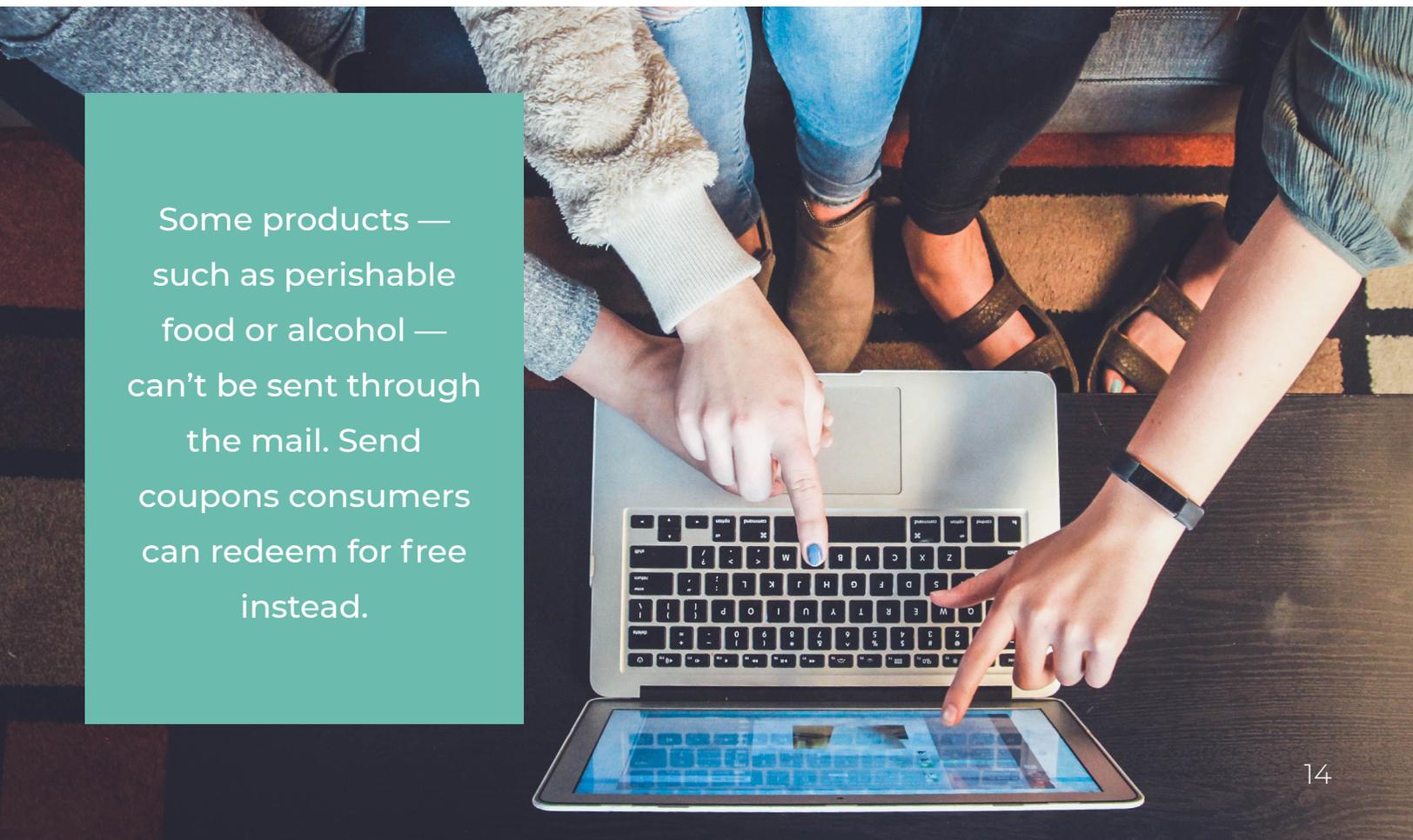
Some products — such as perishable food or alcohol — can't be sent through the mail. Send coupons consumers can redeem for free instead.

Nurture Your Audience

In an ideal world, all consumers who receive a sample will write a review right away. But the reality is, some shoppers will need a reminder.

Be sure to **send ongoing email reminders to those who haven't written a review**, reminding them to do so. You'll achieve a higher review submission rate by doing this.

Ask your product samplers to submit photos and videos with their reviews. 88% of shoppers are actively seeking out photos and videos submitted by other consumers prior to making a purchase. Displaying this content can have a big impact on your site traffic and sales.

ULTA

Hello Molly,
Thank you for your purchase. Please write a review about your recent purchase experience.

Rate Your Purchase

MAC Ruby Red Lipstick
Write a full review

Flower Pots Powder Blush
Write a full review

We appreciate your feedback.
Sincerly,
Ulta Beauty
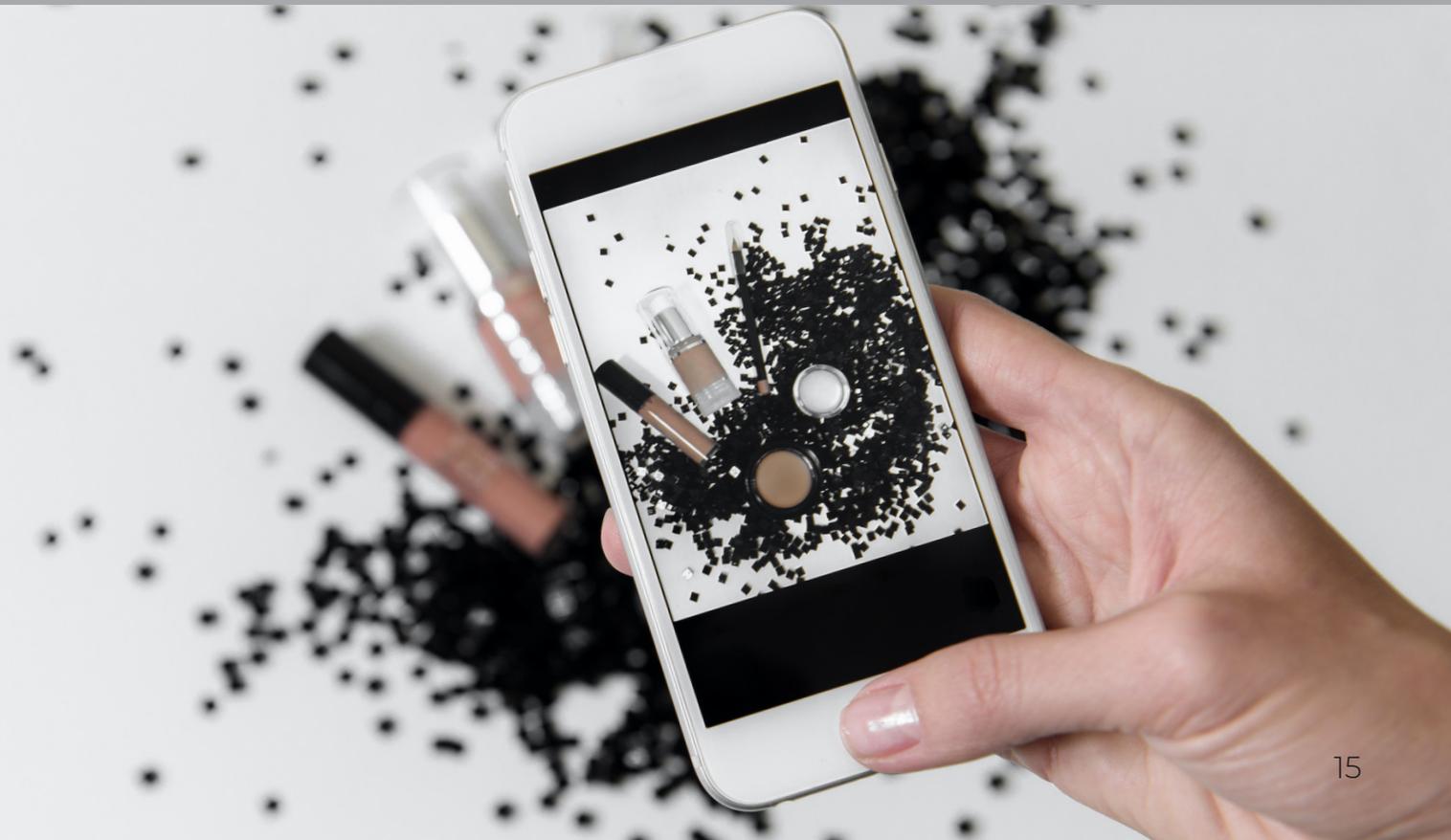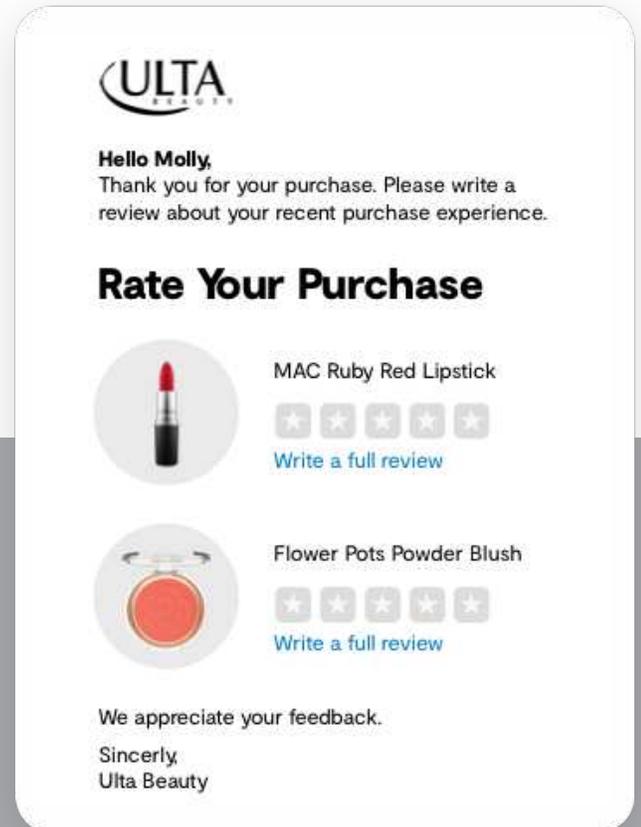
After your audience receives their samples, the reviews will start flowing in. It's important to moderate the content as it comes in, ensuring each review is authentic, relevant and applies to the correct product. This also ensures your reviews do not contain any slander, profanity or anything else that can damage your reputation.

Also, don't be afraid of the occasional negative review! Displaying negative reviews adds a layer of authenticity to your content and helps shoppers more easily identify the products that fit their needs. **Consumers are notoriously suspicious of five star average ratings. Instead, products in the 4.2 - 4.5 range actually tend to perform better.**

Once the review passes through moderation, it's ready to be displayed on your product detail page. Add a badge to the review that let's future shoppers know it was written by someone who received a free sample. This is an important way to maintain transparency and authenticity, while also meeting FTC guidelines.
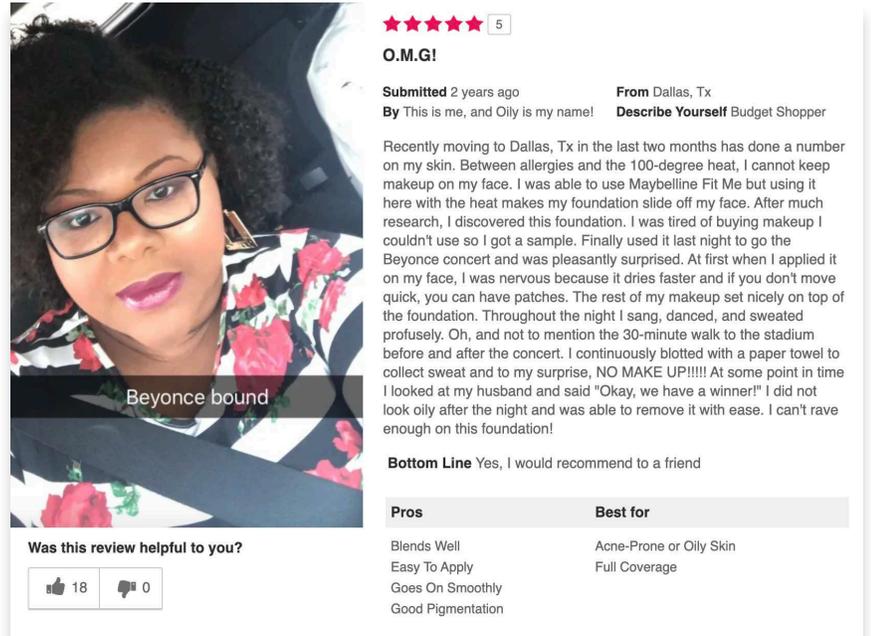
Share Reviews to Retailer Sites

In some cases, consumers shop for your products on your own eCommerce site. But in other instances, they shop via one of your retail partners. For example, if you're a cosmetic company, you may sell through your own brand site, as well as through retailer sites like Ulta, Target and so on. When you share reviews, you increase reach and visibility across all channels.

Shoppers should be able to find reviews for your products, regardless of where they shop for them. Sharing content makes that possible.

When you share content, reviews from your own eCommerce site are also displayed to your product pages on retailer sites. For example, this review was originally written on peanutbutter.com, but it also appears on the product page on Target.com.

Measure Campaign Performance

Once your campaign is finished, it's time to determine whether you met your goals. For example, how many reviews did you generate for that hero product you're launching? If you missed your goal, dig further to determine how you can improve future campaigns.

Content Influence
How are my reviews from sampling stacking up against my standard reviews?

Rating	Character Count	Reviews Per Product	Media Per Product
4.7	**349.4**	**21.9**	**10.5**
4.4	215.8	10.0	1.0

Rating Distribution

5 Stars	2,733
4 Stars	713
3 Stars	150
2 Stars	47
1 Star	13

■ Reviews

Cumulative Ratings and Reviews

■ Reviews — Average Rating

But don't just wait until the campaign is over to measure performance. Instead, be sure to monitor performance throughout the campaign to see realtime stats and review content that's been submitted. Then adjust accordingly.

Leverage Insights to Improve Products and Customer Experiences

The reviews you generate from product sampling campaigns are a gold mine of actionable insights. And these insights can help you deliver products and experiences your shoppers love.

For example, you can measure overall sentiment for reviews written for a specific product. If the sentiment seems negative, you can dig deeper to identify themes. Maybe shoppers love a shampoo you sell, but they don't like the packaging. You can work with your supplier to improve packaging, and then watch your average star rating soar.

Of course, this higher star rating will drive more product sales — and more satisfied customers.
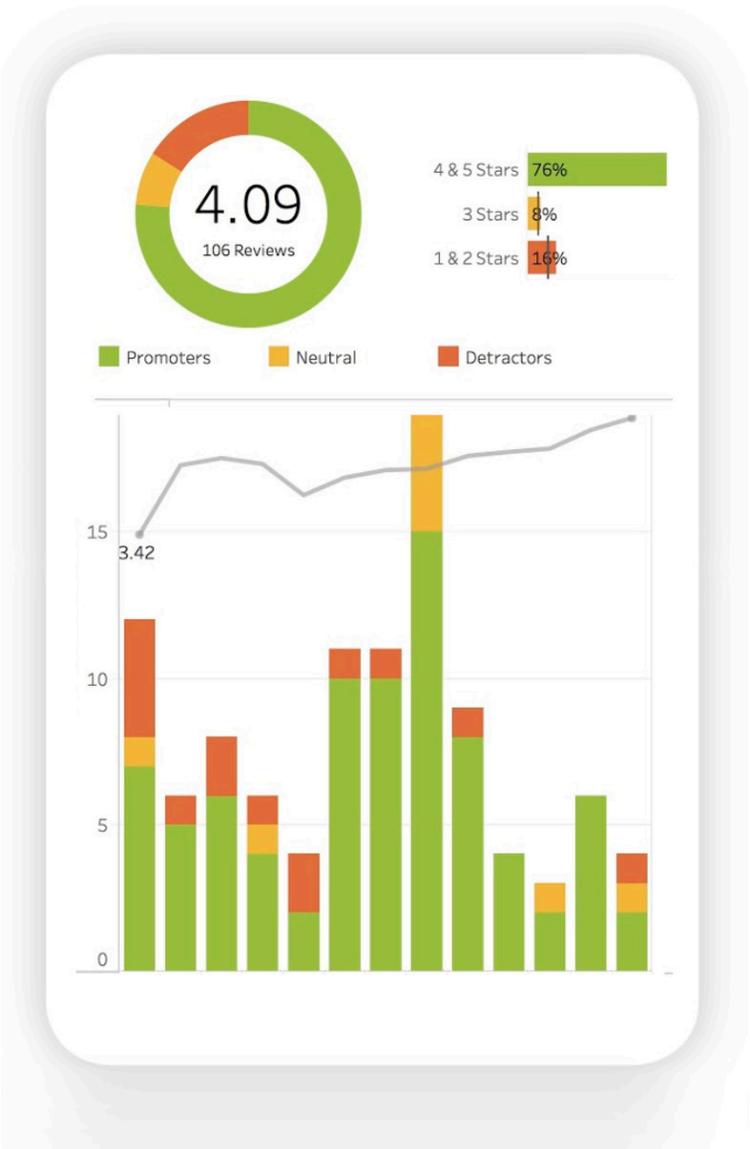
> **"**
> We stopped selling the products we realized were disappointing customers. We didn't have this information before, and now I can't imagine operating without it; it's key to our long-term customer relationships. **"**
>
> **HENRY COLEMAN**
> *VP OF MARKETING, HAMMACHER SCHLEMMER*

Partner with the Pros

Product sampling campaigns are extremely effective … when they're done right. But these campaigns have a lot of moving parts, and managing them in-house represents a serious logistical and time-consuming challenge. Instead, consider partnering with a vendor that has expertise in product sampling.

At PowerReviews, we've honed a sophisticated and proven product sampling methodology that produces predictable guaranteed results every time. And we'll manage the entire process for you — from kickoff to campaign summary supporting — to help **ensure your campaigns are successful.**

> *The PowerReviews team is always proactive in helping us explore new ways to reach and connect with customers. With their ease of use, fantastic support and valuable insights, PowerReviews has been critical in improving how we provide customers with the information they need to guide them through the purchasing journey.*

WHITNEY CONNER,
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SUPPORT,
MIZUNO USA

Conclusion

Reviews have become an expected part of the purchase journey, regardless of product category. If shoppers can't find this content on a brand's website, they'll go elsewhere to find it — and likely won't return.

Winning brands and retailers must make it a priority to provide plenty of product reviews. After all, this content is critical to attracting and converting shoppers.

Product sampling offers a simple way to generate more product reviews. By following the steps in this guide and partnering with product sampling experts, you can ensure your campaigns yield a high volume of review content that drives sales.

CONTACT US

Email Address	marketing@powerreviews.com
Social	@PowerofReviews
U.S. Phone	+1 312.447.6100 / +1 844.231.7540

PowerReviews helps leading retailers and brands generate reviews in larger volumes to significantly increase sales, while enabling you with the analytics to optimize product performance.

Request a Demo →

POWER REVIEWS