

The social commerce success workbook

Eight tips to make reviews and
social content deliver real results



Introduction

When you ask businesses about social commerce, you'll hear one of two responses. The first is outright dismissal: 'social' is just the latest buzzword, all marketing fluff with no real impact on sales, traffic or your bottom line.

But ask another company and you'll hear a totally different story. They'll tell you that reviews, recommendations, Facebook integration and other social tools are an unbeatable way to attract, engage, retain and understand your customers better – and the ROI is impressive.

The difference between disappointing results and success comes down to how businesses are using social commerce. A few years ago, just having reviews on your site made you stand out from the crowd, increasing your conversion and bringing in more repeat custom. For a while people thought that just having a Facebook presence for their business was enough too.

The reality is that the way consumers buy has moved on, and forward-looking businesses have too.

Today, consumers rely on a range of channels and resources when researching a purchase. Whether they're looking for consumer goods or financial services, a new vehicle or travel and entertainment, a 'purchase journey' will take in a variety of brand and vendor sites, comparison sites, social networks, offline locations and search engines.

Businesses need to engage with would-be customers across all of these channels, in a variety of ways, throughout the entire purchase journey, if they want to see real results from social commerce. Limit your social engagement to one or two channels, and one or two tools, and you'll be disappointed.

This workbook is your guide to putting the latest developments in social commerce to work. With eight simple principles, we'll help you build the kind of seamless, cross-channel social strategy that increases your revenues offline and online, along with your brand recognition and long-term customer loyalty.



1 Go beyond your website

Is your social commerce content only on your website or does it extend across the rest of the web? Can users share their reviews, recommendations and Q&As with their friends on Facebook and Twitter? Can vendors of your products, online publishers, affiliates and partners use your social content?

Keeping your social commerce content in a silo limits its power to drive traffic and conversions. Broadcasting it multiplies its impact. But content broadcast has to be built into your platform, or you'll be doing one-off deals with dozens or hundreds of partners.

Action points

- Encourage social sharing, by making it easy for reviewers to share their content with friends and family on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and more.
- Broadcast your social content to popular shopping and advice sites. Does your social commerce platform let you do this? Does it make it easy?

2 Give people the full picture

The more reviews you can collect, the better. Potential customers are far more convinced by the opinion of 50 or 500 reviewers than just 5, and your conversion rates will prove it.

When you have plenty of social content, you're able to show each browser opinions tailored to their interests and priorities, from people like them. These are some of the most influential recommendations of all.

A high number of reviews will also put the occasional bad review in context, so it doesn't drag down your ratings or put off potential buyers. The secret is to proactively collect reviews from all your customers, so your overall ratings aren't distorted by vocal detractors and you present an accurate, more positive view.

Action points

- Go for volume, for better conversion rates, a better customer experience and higher overall ratings.
- Let people drill down to see reviews and other social content from different consumer segments and 'people like me'.
- Never delete a genuine review, no matter how negative: bad reviews prove you're being open and transparent, increasing the trust that's essential for conversion.

3 Turn customers into advocates

Social commerce shouldn't just be one-way traffic. If a consumer has a question that's stopping them from buying, are you making it easy for them to ask questions to an informed, trusted source: existing customers? If so, are they getting answers as quickly as they need them?

Our research shows that your happiest customers are more likely to offer to answer questions for other consumers. As well as raving about your business, these advocates support your customer services by sharing the expertise that comes from direct experience of your products or services.

But be warned: a passive approach to this kind of Q&A won't work. There will be too few responses and they will come too late. You need to actively engage verified purchasers to turn them into an advocate community.

Action points

- Offer a Q&A service so browsers can ask previous purchasers for advice without ever leaving your site.
- Actively solicit answers – or you'll get too little, too late and potential customers will go elsewhere.

4 Join the conversation

Are you getting involved in the conversations consumers are having about your business or just letting them happen? You're an expert on your brands – don't just sit back and ignore an issue if you can wade in and address it.

If negative feedback is based on a misunderstanding, you need to be able to join in and guide the conversation. There's even a chance to turn that detractor into an advocate. But always make it clear that you're a member of the brand team – transparency is key.

Action points

- Respond to consumer issues publicly via social channels to advise customers and shoppers and demonstrate your commitment to customer care.
- Ensure you can also respond privately: some consumers won't want to discuss problems publicly – for instance, issues with payments.
- Always be transparent. Never let your staff hide their identities or pretend to be consumers.

5 Offer smarter recommendations

Giving intelligent up-sell and cross-sell recommendations on your site is a powerful way to convert browsers into buyers and to increase order values. The very best recommendations come from the wisdom of the crowd: past purchasers of similar products and services, and consumers' social circles.

Make your recommendations smarter by drawing on crowd insight. Your customers and browsers will tell you which products lead to which cross-sell and up-sell opportunities. Then combine these recommendations with what you already know about your regular customers to personalise their experience on your site – and experiment with how you can do the same for new visitors.

Action points

- Let the crowd guide you by generating recommendations from your data about shopper behaviour and preferences.
- Highlight friends' recommendations: reviews from friends and family are the most persuasive recommendations of all.
- Connect the dots to personalise the way you engage with regular customers and new visitors.

6 Bring social content offline

Social commerce drives conversions in the real world too. Are you using great reviews and ratings on your packaging, in-store, on mobile sites and apps, and in advertising campaigns?

Offline social commerce is a powerful conversion driver – as long as your reviews and ratings are trusted. Make sure consumers believe that your reviews are real people's opinions, not just marketing spiel.

Action points

- Take your social content offline at point-of-sale, on packaging and in advertising.
- Make it trustworthy: offline reviews should show where they came from. For even greater trust, use an independent third-party service to collect reviews.

7 Show off your customer service

Product reviews are essential in an increasing number of markets and sectors. But service reviews are growing in importance because they say 'don't just buy – buy here and now, from us'.

A majority of online shoppers now search for retailer and service provider reviews before purchasing¹, and nearly 7 out of 10 say they'd pay more to ensure good customer service². Service reviews translate directly into conversions, by removing the last minute doubts that lead to abandonment.

Action points

- Ask your customers to review the experience of doing business with you (your support, delivery, etc), not just what they bought.
- Never mix product and service reviews – keep them separate for better insight for you, and clearer information for would-be customers.

¹ Fly Research, September 2011

² American Express Customer Service Barometer, 2011

8 Learn from your customers

Social content is probably the greatest untapped source of insight in your business. Combine it with your other data and its power is even greater.

By simply listening to your customers' feedback, you'll get the information you need to improve product development, sales, ranging, service, support and marketing decisions.

Just be sure that the social commerce platform you use offers the heavy-weight analytics you need to turn this much raw data into useful insights, and lets you combine social data with purchase history, browsing habits and demographic data for even more powerful customer intelligence.

Action points

- Analyse your social content – it's a rich resource, don't waste it!
- Cross-reference social data with what you already know about your customers.
- Make sure these insights are available to every department that could use them – marketing, online, product development, ranging and support to start with.

The bottom line

These eight ideas are the core of a successful social commerce strategy. Integrate just a few and your social commerce solution will more than pay for itself, through:

- More referral traffic to your site and footfall in your stores
- Higher conversion rates online and offline
- Higher order values
- Lower support costs
- Happier customers
- Greater customer insight

We've got the data to support all of these benefits, and we'd love to help you build a strategy to take you from low-to-no ROI to social commerce success.

Get in touch

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