

THE RISE OF B2B PRODUCT REVIEWS



HOW B2B MARKETERS
CAN LEVERAGE CUSTOMER
VOICES TO DRIVE
RELEVANCE AND REVENUE



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CHAPTER 01

THE B2B PRODUCT REVIEW OPPORTUNITY

In the internet age, consumers control more of a brand's reputation than ever before. One flash point of this shift in power from businesses to consumers is the impact of online product reviews — think Yelp, think TripAdvisor — to influence the purchase process.

This same process of browsing reviews and checking in with peers is now increasingly common throughout the B2B purchase process. As today's business landscape grows in complexity, savvy B2B buyers are relying — more than ever — on the opinions and expertise of colleagues, peers and trusted networks when researching and making purchase decisions.



When was the last time you booked a hotel or ordered an item online without having prior, informed knowledge of the product? EXACTLY.



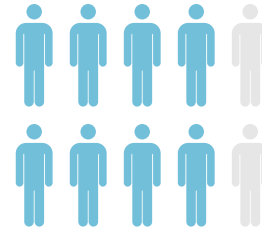


CASE IN POINT:

*A RECENT SURVEY FROM
LINKEDIN FOUND THAT ONLINE
RATINGS AND REVIEWS PLAY
A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN OVER
HALF OF ALL TECHNOLOGY
PURCHASES.*

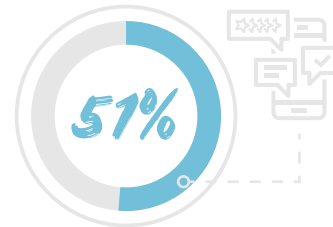


TECHNOLOGY BUYERS TRUST THEIR PEERS

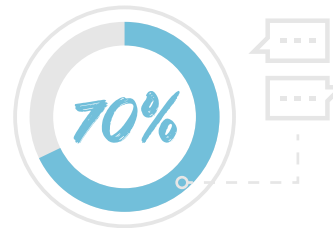


8 in 10 decision-makers

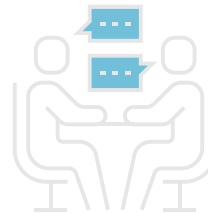
look outside the buying committee for information and counsel on B2B solutions.



Reviews, surveys, and usage stats from fellow technology users **make up 51%** of today's trusted sources.



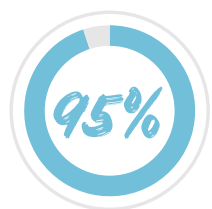
70% of technology buyers are likely to discuss solutions or vendors with their professional peers.



External discussions

around technology solutions and products are highly leveraged resources for both IT and non-IT functions.

The evolution of the buying process has embraced the transparency provided by real user reviews.



Recent research from Northwestern University shows that **95% of shoppers use online reviews** before making a purchase.



And **a product with five reviews** has a **270% higher** likelihood of purchase than a product with zero reviews.

Because buyers want more insight into the value, function, and reliability of products, they use many sources to gain this insight. Often, our peers provide this information, and many times their insight is devoid of traditional advertising and brand messaging.

This is even more relevant for businesses and professionals. In fact, **peer-to-peer, influencer, practitioner, colleague, and authenticated and verified user reviews are today's primary sources for pre-purchase B2B guidance, education, and research**. We see this firsthand as 550,000+ LinkedIn authenticated and human verified user reviews inform purchasing decisions for nearly two million monthly unique visitors on G2 Crowd.

We've created this guide to explore how B2B marketers can take better advantage of the review ecosystem that exists — whether they're participating in it or not. In this guide, we'll examine:



Why reviews are becoming increasingly important to B2B marketers



How B2B marketers can leverage B2B product reviews



How B2B marketers can encourage their customers to write product reviews



How to leverage negative reviews



Why B2B product reviews are part of a larger push toward investing in customer voice as a business and marketer

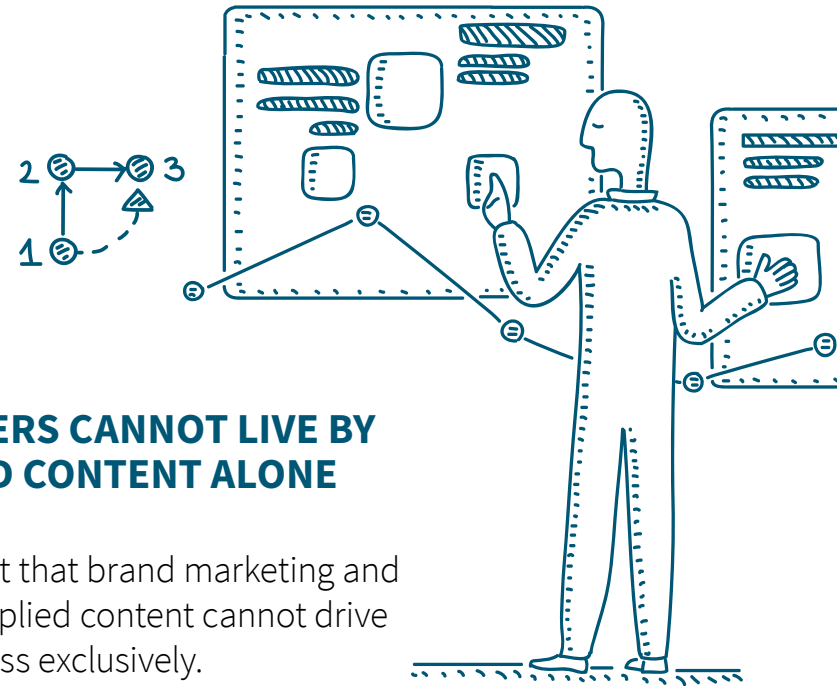


Success stories on how B2B marketers are leveraging product reviews.



CHAPTER 02 B2B PRODUCT REVIEW TRENDS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR MARKETERS

For marketers to effectively leverage and tap into the power of B2B reviews, there are **four key trends and best practices** to take note and advantage of.



MARKETERS CANNOT LIVE BY BRANDED CONTENT ALONE

First, accept that brand marketing and vendor-supplied content cannot drive new business exclusively.



With approximately **two-thirds** of customers **steering clear of branded content altogether**,



we must **rethink how our brands build trust** and condition consumers and professionals to **champion our products and services**.

Stress test this against your own buying behaviors, both personal and professional. We've all learned to make better, more informed purchases — priming ourselves to relentlessly seek the truth.

MARKET YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES TO SOLVE PROBLEMS



Second, B2B buyers seek realistic expectations of products that will come close to meeting their needs — and brand affinity will not likely place vendors on the short list. Spend time evaluating how your products or solutions are marketed to solve business problems, and why (or why not) they complement or fit new and existing technology ecosystems.

The reality is that buyers are not looking for the perfect product, they are looking for the product that best fits their needs. A small business does not want to purchase a product designed for enterprise customers. And if usability is the primary concern, then it is not searching for the product with the fastest implementation process. When you tell your product story, provide an honest look at your strengths and help prospects find the best fit. In turn, they are more likely to become loyal customers.



IN REVIEWS, AUTHENTICITY WINS



Third, if there are too many good reviews, buyers won't believe it. Research from Northwestern University shows that **products with an average star rating in the 4.2-4.7 range are MORE likely to be purchased than those with near-perfect ratings**. This tells us that buyers are keen for honest, real opinions. In fact, it's hard to pinpoint one single product or service that has only happy customers.

Embrace the good and the bad about your offerings — and use this as a discussion point to qualify the investment and how it can address your customers' business needs. **Critical reviews are an opportunity for vendors to publicly engage with dissatisfied customers and exhibit their customer service**, which is central to any business relationship. These reviews can also reveal true product fit use cases, as well as insights into the strength and weakness of both you and your competitors' product(s) and features.



LEVERAGE UNBIASED REVIEWS



Last, vendors are quickly embracing the huge potential and benefits of reviews. Buyers want unbiased information to help find their optimal solution. Brands that are ahead of the curve leverage B2B reviews to sell to customers who are educated and ready to buy.



The bottom line? Marketers should seriously consider implementing a review strategy. Your competitors certainly are.

NEXT

CHAPTER 03

ENCOURAGING YOUR CUSTOMERS TO WRITE PRODUCT REVIEWS



Spiegel's research, referenced before, also uncovers that product reviews may have even greater importance to B2B than to B2C marketers due to the likelihood of higher-consideration purchases being made. One illuminating figure from the report: "Based on data from a gift retailer, when reviews were displayed for a lower-priced product, the conversion rate increased 190%. However, for a higher-priced product, the conversion rate increased 380%."

Another finding revealed that, in general, **more reviews lead to more purchases**. "When products begin displaying reviews, conversion rates escalate. Having five reviews causes purchase likelihood to increase by a factor of nearly 4x."

Adding to these insights, a new Forrester report entitled, "Driving Customer Engagement with B2B Ratings and Reviews," reveals that quality reviews play a crucial role in shaping purchase intent. "For ratings and reviews, review quality is the key to attracting readership and interest. Reviews such as 'It's great' or 'Don't buy this' don't offer enough detail to be useful for the typical B2B customer."



190%

When reviews were displayed for a lower-priced product, the **conversion rate increased 190%**.



380%

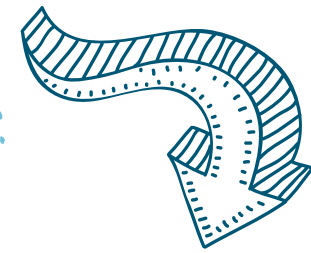
For a higher-priced product, the **conversion rate increased 380%**.



4x

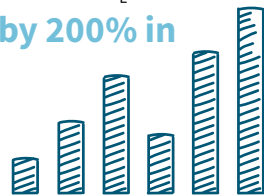
Five reviews causes purchase likelihood to **increase by a factor of nearly 4x**.

Compounding these recent findings, we recognize that attracting an optimal volume of quality reviews can be a challenge for B2B marketers. *TO HELP, HERE ARE FIVE WAYS TO ENCOURAGE REVIEWS AND RATINGS OF YOUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES.*



ACTIVELY SOLICIT REVIEWS AND RATINGS

Don't be shy about asking customers to review and rate your products so you can reach a critical mass of customer input. In the Forrester report, Bruno cited two companies that successfully solicited reviews: Intuit and 3M. For its TurboTax product, Intuit solicited reviews "seconds after users submitted their taxes," while a healthcare division of 3M placed review submission screens in forums and communities. These two approaches were found to "increase review volume [in one online community] by 200% in just three days."



TAKE THE EXTRA STEP AND ENCOURAGE COMMENTS

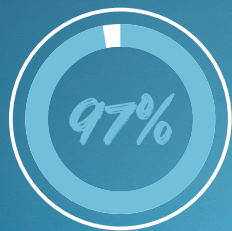
Once a review is posted, it's not the end of the story. The best reviews — both negative and positive — can stand up to scrutiny by peers in the industry. Forrester posits that this kind of interplay between product users should be fostered, and that "B2B sites must encourage other customers to validate or invalidate existing opinions."

B2B

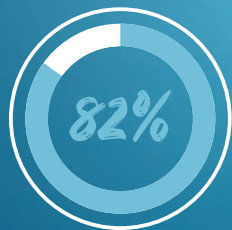
MAKE IT EASY FOR CUSTOMERS TO SUBMIT REVIEWS

Noting that many B2B markets are small and competitive, Forrester encourages companies to ask customers to submit testimonials. With sites now offering reviewers the ability to write high-quality, verifiable input with confidentiality, Forrester also recommends "making it easy for users of the product to submit reviews by embedding reviews and rating opportunities as part of the installation or customer service process."





97% of IT buyers indicate that they rely on peer recommendations, ratings, and reviews when it comes to buying business software



82% of shoppers make a point to read negative reviews

STRIVE FOR AUTHENTICITY

Ideally, marketers want reviews to be submitted by end users rather than purchasing managers. “With 97% of IT buyers indicating that they rely on peer recommendations, ratings, and reviews when it comes to buying business software, B2B sites must give special status to reviews posted by power users of a product,” says Forrester. The inclusion of negative reviews also lends an air of credibility to a website — with 82% of shoppers making a point to read negative reviews, per PowerReviews. The aforementioned Spiegel report further supports this point, noting that **“readers are skeptical of reviews that are too positive and, in many cases, a negative online review is seen as more credible.”**



EXTEND THE REACH OF REVIEWS

The syndication of reviews can create a multiplier effect. “Several digital business pros who Forrester interviewed indicated that syndicating their ratings and reviews to supplier and manufacturer partners increased the total net number of ratings and reviews across the entire channel,” Bruno writes.



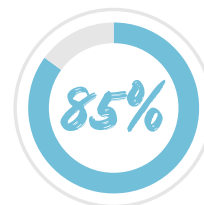
CHAPTER 04

GLASS HALF FULL: HOW TO LEVERAGE NEGATIVE REVIEWS

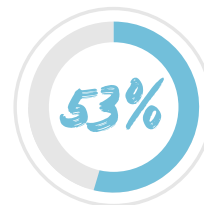
As the saying goes, it's impossible to please everyone. But in the world of B2B reviews, a frustrated or unhappy customer can be one of your biggest assets. **It's true: You can turn negative reviews into a positive.**

LET US EXPLAIN.

Today's buyer selection process revolves around education and trust.



In fact, 85% of technology decision-makers **read up to 10 online reviews** before making a purchase —



and 53% rely on peer recommendations, per G2 Crowd's latest research on customer reviews.

Honest voices from savvy customers help to build credibility and transparency around your products or services in a way that traditional advertising cannot. Take it from the experts, as user behavior on G2 Crowd recently showed that:



negative reviews (those with one or two stars) receive nearly **200% to 300% more clicks** and views than positive reviews.

For marketers, this reveals untapped opportunity to leverage reviews without the stress of striving for perfection. And when it comes to making lackluster feedback work in your favor, try the following quick roadmap to success.



Yes



Wow

Embrace and promote the gamut of existing online feedback about your company, and contribute to these conversations. Now that the Consumer Review Freedom Act is in place, you can no longer prevent consumers from expressing negative opinions, so you're better off owning up to any shortcomings and positioning them as a learning experience.

Offer a response, clear up misconceptions, or provide further insights from your brand as a next step. Shoppers who seek out negative reviews are more engaged with their pre-purchase research, viewing nearly four times as many products as the average visitor to a site.

Build relationships with and help influence your community of reviewers. At this stage, it's important to respond quickly, thank the customer for their feedback, and explain how you'll fix the issue at hand. This shows that you care and will go a long way toward helping to build trust.



No



STILL NOT CONVINCED?

A RECENT HARRIS STUDY CONCLUDED THAT 18% OF PEOPLE BECAME LOYAL CUSTOMERS AFTER A COMPANY RESPONDED TO THEIR LESS-THAN-POSITIVE REVIEW.



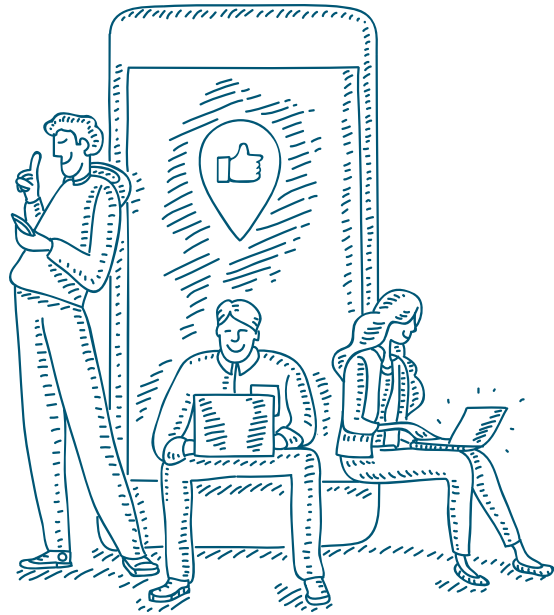
Recognize that solutions are built to fit better with some companies than others.

One size rarely fits all. Some software is designed to help small businesses, while others are amazing solutions for enterprise players. In other instances, a solution is built to excel in a certain business vertical. Discussions with negative reviewers can often lead to a better product fit, more satisfied customers, and perhaps better reviews. Be sure to use filtering options on review sites to get the best data and feedback for your company size, industry, etc.

Proactively gather insight on what you can do better. It's possible that a complaint exposes real problems with your product or service. Use this valuable information to fuel your customer experience feedback look — and don't forget to thank the brave person who submitted the feedback.

Once an issue has been addressed or corrected, reach out and seize the opportunity to ask for an updated review. This is the most important step you can take to help influence future purchasing decisions.





CHAPTER 05

HARNESS THE GROWING POWER OF YOUR CUSTOMERS' VOICES



As we all know, buyer voices control the majority of today's purchase process, and playing an active role in this conversation is a critical step for B2B brands. Turn detractors into champions and loyal customers by encouraging an open, honest, and constructive atmosphere. In time, this will lead to satisfied customers, a better product, and — most importantly — more sales.

The value of product reviews is growing, and growing fast. No longer are reviews solely lower-funnel marketing opportunities.



Effective marketers are beginning to understand that product reviews can have an outsized influence on the entire funnel and the complete customer experience — from product development and thought leadership to website and social media marketing.

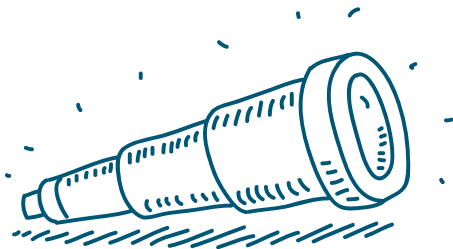
Ultimately, reviews and customer comments on social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter are a fertile ground for marketers. By paying attention to customer voices, marketers can learn how their products and services are being perceived in the marketplace. Product reviews and customer comments can even provide a pathway for marketers and engineers to understand how their products and services can be improved or marketed more effectively.

HERE ARE SEVEN WAYS MARKETERS CAN USE PRODUCT REVIEWS THROUGHOUT THE FUNNEL — FROM DESIGNING BETTER PRODUCT ENHANCEMENTS TO UPSELLING AND CROSS-SELLING EXISTING CUSTOMERS.



R&D — DEVELOP NEW PRODUCTS AND IMPROVE CURRENT ONES

Through product reviews, customers can often provide clues as to what additional features they'd like from a product. By paying careful attention to reviews and user comments, marketers can discern how to improve current products by fixing flaws and even develop ideas for new products by fulfilling customer wishes.



PRODUCE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND OTHER CONTENT

By monitoring product reviews and customer comments on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, marketers can get a window into what their audience cares most about. For instance, if your product has dozens of features but users focus their comments on only two or three, this can be an opportunity for insightful marketers to build thought leadership content around the features that are most important to their audience. Additionally, marketers can monitor what the audience is saying about competitors and emphasize any advantages to craft content that gives their company the upper hand.

GENERATE CASE STUDIES

For marketing teams looking to feature customer voices, positive product reviews are a must-have. In the past, case studies have been challenging for marketers to produce. It's often a challenge to find a customer who: a) loves your product, and b) is willing to say so publicly. With positive reviews, a) and b) are taken care of; all that remains is convincing the happy customer to participate in a formal case study. Even negative product reviews can provide opportunities for case studies. When a company solves the problem in a bad review, the story of turning a negative into a positive can make for a compelling customer tale.

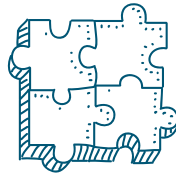


ADDRESS NEGATIVE REVIEWS HEAD-ON

While negative reviews are unfortunate, they also present a big opportunity. Shoppers who seek out negative reviews are generally more engaged with their pre-purchase research, viewing almost four times as many products as the average visitor to a site. Marketers should seek out customers who have posted bad reviews, offer a response, and clear up misconceptions. If these negative reviews identify a genuine problem, marketers should work to get the issue fixed. And when customers who post a bad review have their issue addressed, marketers can even reach out for updated — and presumably more positive — reviews.

SUPPORT ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING

Account-based marketing relies on strong communication between marketing and sales. By monitoring product reviews and social media comments by specific customer accounts, marketers can glean important information that can be passed to their sales counterparts. The sales team can then use these insights to better understand what specific accounts need and want.



EQUIP SALESPEOPLE WITH THE TOOLS AND CONTENT TO COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY WITH CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS

In addition to supporting ABM and tactics for addressing specific accounts, product reviews can inspire content that addresses how the broader marketplace responds to your products, including the identification of pain points that need to be addressed. By studying product reviews and social media comments by the target audience, marketers can better equip salespeople with content and presentations that speak directly to customers' needs.



PROVIDE SALES ENABLEMENT

Marketing can curate key learnings from product reviews, such as comments that help inform how the market is thinking about or pushing back on your products/services. This approach helps salespeople update their positioning, ensure they're proactively addressing potential concerns, and, as a result, increase their likelihood of winning deals.

The customer voice is becoming more crucial every day, and listening to it can be the difference between marketing that succeeds and marketing that fails. Product reviews are a key part of the customer voice, and marketers who pay close attention to this aspect of the customer voice can boost their effectiveness throughout the funnel.



CHAPTER 06

SUCCESS STORIES: HOW B2B MARKETERS ARE LEVERAGING PRODUCT REVIEWS FOR SUCCESS

There's no question that review sites are crucial platforms for business and consumer markets. The experiences of **Kimble** and **Looker** go a long way in demonstrating the value of monitoring product reviews and listening to and acting on the voice of the customer.



CASE STUDY:

PRODUCT REVIEWS LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD FOR KIMBLE'S SPECIALIZED PSA SOLUTION



KIMBLE

When it began to consider partnering with G2 Crowd, Kimble Professional Services Automation faced off against well-funded competitors with bigger marketing budgets to promote their PSA offerings. With Kimble's strong focus on innovation and customer satisfaction, it has devoted far more resources to product development than to marketing and sales. Kimble's goal is to let the product speak for itself.

But how could Kimble ensure that its solutions gained visibility amid a sea of competitors buying online advertising? Kimble's answer was to leverage the G2 Crowd platform.

With G2 Crowd, Kimble has boosted its brand awareness and flow of qualified leads. G2 Crowd's verified user reviews assure Kimble that "real" customers are commenting on its PSA solutions as well as its competitors' products.

Through G2 Crowd, prospective customers gain a balanced and independent view of multiple PSA solutions in one place. Kimble also leverages its high user satisfaction ratings in the highly competitive PSA category to reach prospective buyers. Thanks to G2 Crowd reviews, customers are able to see how Kimble's PSA solutions work with complementary "best-in-class" products from other vendors. This allows Kimble to gain an edge against larger firms with suite solutions that include a PSA component.



By using G2 Crowd as a key part of its marketing efforts, Kimble has leveled the playing field for its specialized PSA solution. Kimble's customer success teams point clients and prospective customers to the G2 Crowd site for impartial and independent reviews. Reviews also establish an important feedback loop, creating a better experience for users.

In addition, Kimble sees a trend toward moving away from product suites to individual products. Capitalizing on this idea, Kimble ensures that its products can be integrated with other software to customize the user experience.

G2 Crowd gives people choice from multiple providers — it doesn't matter how many marketing dollars a firm has to spend. It's not about telling people what to buy; it's about educating buyers.

MARK ROBINSON
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER,
KIMBLE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AUTOMATION



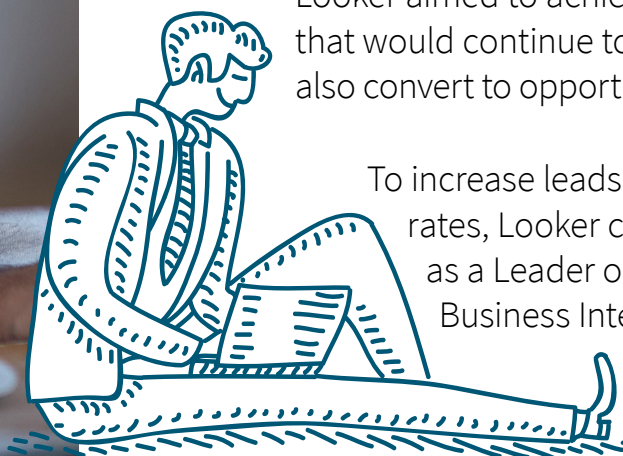
CASE STUDY:

LOOKER CONNECTS WITH BUYERS AT THE RIGHT TIME ON LINKEDIN

Looker found that prospective buyers evaluating business intelligence platforms often utilize networks such as LinkedIn during the due diligence stage of the buying process. Looker needed a way to connect with these buyers during this consideration period to deliver valuable, relevant information, with the ultimate goal of bringing them into the sales process.

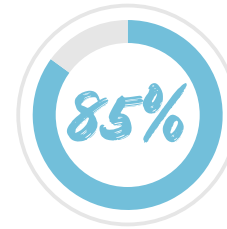
Previously, Looker had promoted various content assets on LinkedIn, such as case studies, blogs, and advertisements, to engage these prospects. These campaigns succeeded by increasing leads, but fell short of the lead-to-opportunity conversion rate Looker aimed to achieve. Looker needed a campaign that would continue to drive leads from LinkedIn and also convert to opportunities at a high rate.

To increase leads and drive higher conversion rates, Looker chose to promote its status as a Leader on the G2 Crowd Grid® for Business Intelligence Platforms report with a Sponsored Content campaign on LinkedIn.

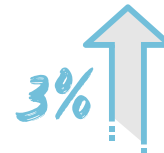


Looker has a strong presence on G2 Crowd, with reviews from companies of all sizes and industries. With a satisfied customer base that has continued to grow, it earned Leader status on the G2 Crowd Grid® for Business Intelligence Platforms report. Using a Sponsored Content campaign on LinkedIn, Looker was able to target its ideal prospects with G2 Crowd's Business Intelligence Grid. The Grid offers product insights ranging from overall satisfaction to ease of implementation and usability. By offering these prospects a trusted third-party asset, Looker was able to provide valuable content to the right people at the right time.

Promoting G2 Crowd content via LinkedIn Sponsored Content has been a winning combination for Looker. According to LinkedIn, Looker's campaign is consistently the top sponsored content across all technology advertisers and **generates six times the average click-through rate** compared to the average campaign.



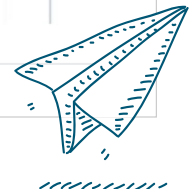
For Looker, this campaign has generated approximately **85% of all leads** from paid channels.



The campaign's 3% conversion rate has **outperformed other content assets**, including other third-party analyst reports,



and has maintained a higher-than-average click-through rate on LinkedIn for **more than six months**.



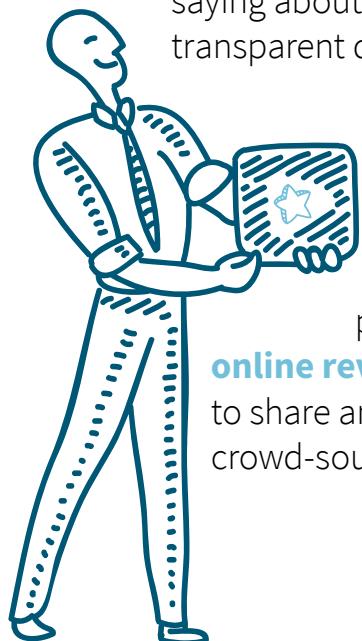
CHAPTER 07

THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN LINKEDIN AND G2 CROWD



LinkedIn and G2 Crowd have a strategic partnership in which reviews from the G2 Crowd site may be shared and brought to life by LinkedIn members while providing product insight on the LinkedIn platform. This functionality allows reviewers to showcase their unique skill sets, knowledge, and expertise with B2B products and services and, likewise, enable brands to promote their customers' ratings and reviews by spurring meaningful conversations with their LinkedIn followers.

With detailed reviews of B2B products and services now a part of the newly searchable LinkedIn newsfeed, we encourage you to explore this functionality — **tagged #B2Breviews** — and discover what users are saying about brands while helping us foster improved, enriched, and transparent discussions.



This integration is driving value for LinkedIn's technology decision-making community — fostering improved B2B knowledge sharing and empowering LinkedIn members to grow and tell their professional stories. And for solution providers, with **more than 67% of today's buyers using online reviews as part of their daily purchasing process**, the ability to share and engage with these third-party online reviews in a trusted crowd-sourced environment is a unique and highly valued opportunity.





Founded in 2003, LinkedIn connects the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. With 560 million members worldwide, including executives from Fortune 500 companies, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network.

For more information, visit
marketing.linkedin.com

