



SOCIAL TRENDS REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

The very nature of shopping is fundamentally changing before us. Mobile devices have overtaken personal computers as the preferred device for researching purchases, both online and in-store. Today's competitive landscape requires that companies constantly evolve to survive.

In this year's report, we'll examine five critical trends explored at Bazaarvoice events that are shaping the world of commerce. With insights from the world's foremost marketers, experts, and business thinkers, we'll show you how to utilize the voice of the consumer to transform the way you do business.

CONSUMER-GENERATED CONTENT HAS GROWN UP ◀

The integration of the Internet into consumers' everyday lives has transformed the way they consume, create, and share content—especially how they make purchasing decisions. Consumer-generated content (CGC) is the key to the next phase of marketing that brings all these concepts together. [Read more](#)

THE MOBILE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED ◀

Consumers purchase more than 1 billion smartphones yearly, exponentially expanding the consumer's "power" to research, communicate, and do business. Mobile devices must be the focal point for companies. [Read more](#)

SEARCH IS CHANGING, ARE YOU READY? ◀

Busy consumers have no time to scroll through pages of competitive Google results. They're looking for a reliable indicator that they can trust: it's reviews, and it has changed searching forever. [Read more](#)

CONSUMERS WANT A SEAMLESS SHOPPING EXPERIENCE ◀

Retailers should no longer fear the mobile-enabled shopper who researches, reviews, and compares prices, but instead realize this as an opportunity to provide helpful, targeted CGC content in the retail channel. [Read more](#)

OPEN YOUR EYES – VISUAL CONTENT IS CHANGING THE GAME ◀

Nearly 75% of online users are active on social channels, sharing opinions, ideas, and especially product-related photos. Brands have a huge new opportunity to connect with consumers visually and emotionally via CGC in the form of social photographs. [Read more](#)



[View Worx's award video at the 2015 Bazaarvoice Summit.](#)

CONSUMER-GENERATED CONTENT HAS GROWN UP

The voice of the consumer continues to rise as the most powerful and trusted content by shoppers. It's the next wave of feedback and innovation. As a result, consumer-generated content (CGC) has grown and expanded into different types of content: photos, videos, questions, chats, and more. Moving well beyond traditional word-of-mouth marketing, CGC has transformed into a powerful, trusted, and essential form of communication between people and businesses.

What exactly can businesses learn based on all that information? How can they use this content to deliver better shopping experiences and build lasting customer relationships?

A NEW WAY OF MARKETING ◀

Shoppers today want to know about brands, but they also want to know about the experience of engaging in a relationship with that brand. CGC addresses that curiosity with a rich new segment of content that bridges the gap between online and offline, wherever shoppers are in the purchase path. Marketers must realize the opportunity this CGC interaction creates.

From ratings and reviews to social media content, photos and tweets, companies using CGC as part of their marketing tactics are experiencing more engagement with their customers resulting in more sales. For example, power tool and equipment brand, Worx, views using CGC as an essential metric to measure the impact of their marketing.

According to **Marissa Carter, eCommerce Marketing Analyst at Worx:**

"We also wanted to enhance our communication with our customers. Ratings and Reviews was a way for us to do that. Even though we were communicating with them via social media and over the phone, Ratings and Reviews was a way for consumers to talk and see how other people were interacting with our tools. We wanted to enhance that communication, engage them, and get some quality insights into what our products were doing for people, how they were using them, and what we could possibly pull from that to help with production and obviously customer service."

Increasingly, consumers trust the opinions of like-minded consumers more than they trust brand messaging. Bazaarvoice research shows that 44% of millennials are more likely to trust experienced consumers over brands and three times more likely to use social media to find consumer opinions. Brands and retailers must prioritize the content their consumers prefer to see: ratings, reviews, questions, and social posts written by actual consumers sharing their honest opinions—good and bad—on the brand and its products. Integrating this content into marketing initiatives is the best possible strategy to establish a connection with shoppers. **Marissa Carter on CGC:**

"We have plans to integrate into other areas of our marketing as well. We've got commercials and infomercials coming up. We want to put that information on there. We want to continue to do the giveaways and the sweeps and put this information on our product packaging and continue to reiterate that we have really great products via the consumers' opinions through our blogs, videos, and through various other media outlets."

Discovering new ways to build the voice of the consumer into marketing strategy is key to success in the new marketplace. Integrating CGC into packaging, media, billboards, and even physical spaces are all creative and real-world concepts that are paying off for companies. Businesses who want to build better shopping experiences and improve customer relationships need only include

CGC into their marketing. **84% of millennials cite CGC as having some influence on what they buy as compared to 70% of boomers.** To find more about how CGC impacts shoppers, read [The info-hungry consumer: 3 trends transforming the online food and beverage landscape](#)

THE MOBILE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED, AND IT'S HEADED IN-STORE

Last year, mobile became known as “The fastest growing channel, with more people spending more time (and money) every year consuming content on their smartphones and tablets.” The hard truth is that mobile is the channel every brand and retailer should be prioritizing. Consumer adoption of smart devices is proving to be the single most important trend in consumer behavior in the past 20 years. According to **Mark Steel, Digital Operations Director, Argos Ltd, a major British retailer:**

“I do genuinely believe mobile is still one of the most important factors, one of the most important trends when we’re thinking about delivering a great experience for our customers. The power and the technology that the vast majority of our customers now carry around with them every single day, it’s just opening up a whole new world of opportunities for retailers to engage with their customers.”

In stores, mobile shoppers are looking for information about specific products; checking out product reviews and pictures; comparing prices and shipping options; and reading consumer Q&A. Brands now have a window into the retail channel and the in-store shopper, due in large part to shopper marketing.

WHAT IS SHOPPER MARKETING? ◀

Shopper marketing is an emerging term defined as “understanding how one’s target consumer behaves as a shopper,” and “using that understanding to influence their purchasing decisions.” Often taking place in different channels and formats—such as paid media or physical in-store displays—advancements in mobile technology now

extend these tactics to consumers’ mobile devices while they are in the shopping aisle. Consumers are beginning to expect an integrated experience in the shopping aisle. For years, retailers have been trying to fill this need, as **Danny Silverman, Global Head of Business Consulting Services, Clavis Insight,** notes:

“It’s an omnichannel shopper, and she expects the same thing online as in-store, and so, bringing that content from online to store, and from store back to online is more critical than ever.”





Bazaarvoice sees more than 700 million monthly unique active shoppers, which is more than any other single source representing the vast majority of digital shoppers in North America & Western Europe. We understand shopper behavior based on what they read and what they do during their sessions on our network on a product, brand, and category level. And we understand consumer sentiment based on what people are actually saying about a product.

THE RETAIL GAME HAS CHANGED ◀

The world of interconnected devices, experiences, and feedback-loops is changing from consumer to brand. With new channels to engage shoppers, the proliferation of mobile, and the ability to access content on-demand, purchasing power has clearly shifted from the brand and retailer to the consumer.

The consumer purchase journey has become more interesting and full of opportunity for buyers and sellers alike. However, brands continue to have awkward conversations. They know who they want to target, but are placing messages that are not reaching their ideal consumers, primarily due to little insight into how people are searching for them at any given moment. Unfortunately, most brands use too random of an approach to content placement.

Tomorrow's top brands will focus their marketing on a cohesive strategy that touches shoppers at the moment of peak interest until well after they have become brand advocates. This new type of integrated campaign will help create shoppers who are happier, more satisfied, and more loyal to a brand or retailer.

Mobile devices deliver the technology that transcends the digital realm to support shoppers in the physical world. As much as [30% of consumers](#) have changed their mind in the shopping aisle as a result of information gathered on their smartphone.

For example, The Home Depot has the ability to send location-specific coupons and promotions to consumers in a physical store, just as [The Home Depot's mobile site](#) gives shoppers access to real-time store inventory, pricing, and aisle location for merchandise in the store. This integration with store inventory allows shoppers to order items that are out of stock for store pick-up later—all via smartphones. With the new mobile site featuring more than 1,000 how-to videos optimized for in-store mobile research, Home Depot keeps DIY shoppers interacting with the retailer across multiple points of the shopping process.

Interactions such as these demonstrate how retailers should no longer fear the mobile shopper, but instead embrace consumers that are using these devices for product information, reviews, and price comparisons. It is precisely these moments when a manufacturer has an ideal opportunity to reach shoppers with helpful advertising content with [targeted CGC](#).

84% OF MILLENNIALS CITE CGC AS HAVING SOME INFLUENCE ON WHAT THEY BUY.

SEARCH IS EVOLVING; ARE YOU READY?

As Google continues to update their search algorithms, it's critical that marketers follow their lead and invest where Google invests—consumer-generated content such as ratings and reviews, questions and answers, testimonials and social media posts—giving websites an edge when competing for placement against competitors.

Search engines elevate site results with fresh content publication. **Adding reviews to a product page typically results in a 15–25% increase in search traffic.** With every Google change and update, today's search engine optimization (SEO) is no longer the science it was 9 months ago, which means SEO experts must evolve their approach to keep their pages ranking. Understanding Google's current search dynamic is paramount to success.

THE OCTOBER 27TH UPDATE ◀

Since the beginning of SEO time (about 1995), there has been a well-accepted understanding that search engines read the initial HTML version, or server-side markup, of web pages. In many cases, this included only a small portion of the total content seen by humans as client-side technologies such as JavaScript and AJAX finished the page display. Because of this limitation, search engines had been blind to a significant percentage of the content on the Internet for nearly 20 years.

On October 27th, 2014, Google updated their Technical Webmaster Guidelines—mostly unnoticed by the SEO community—to stop blocking JavaScript and CSS files in robots.txt files, warning of sub-optimal rankings if the crawler was unable to read these files. This change marked the beginning of a new era for SEO, demanding changes to old habits and tools. **Head of SEO at iCrossing Doug Platz** on the recent update:

***“So historically, if we wanted to optimize our content we can write for content, we can write for metadata. But it’s all creating the content and then uploading it [with CNS]. With structured data, we’re starting to make changes to the code of the page. And so that can be a little bit more challenging and requires more work and coordination with your web development teams, waiting for certain releases and things like that.**”*

“We’ve seen huge increases in click-through rate, which has resulted in increased traffic and increased conversions. So it’s an incredibly powerful offering, incredibly powerful solution that we’ve integrated both into our search practice, into our web-build practice, and continue trying to integrate more for all of our clients and all of the brands that we work with.”

OPERATING IN THE NEW SEO WORLD ◀

Now that Google has updated its algorithm, how do businesses gain visibility and build market share? Historically, a business' website category pages were pretty boring with little-to-no time invested into the content and the development of those pages. The primary intent of these pages was to lead the visitor to the purchase path as quickly as possible. But from the very beginning, search engines—including Google—looked for good content and markup: the content needed to be there, and the search engine must easily see and understand the markup.

Most website category levels feature a variety of branded categories in addition to generic categories such as size, style, color, etc. At this point, visitors may not know exactly what they want, as they “just want an LED TV. Don't know what brand yet.” Or they could search using a modified category filter, such as “know the size, might know a feature.”





CONSUMERS WANT A SEAMLESS SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

As shoppers shift from seeing offline and online as separate entities, marketers must work tirelessly to combine the experiences and deliver a seamless experience that goes beyond traditional shopping channels. **Mark Steel, Digital Operations Director, Argos Ltd**, commented on creating seamless shopping:

“Reposition channels for a digital future. This is about: how do we harness technology—both for digital channels and in our stores—to make great experiences for customers. And this is our articulation of how we put customers at the heart of our thinking. So this is where we think about customers. This is the articulation in our strategic plan for being really centered on our customers.”

Designing a shopping experience for business involves building real interaction points at every step along the way as consumers don't consider retail, mobile, and online as different channels.

REPOSITION CHANNELS FOR THE DIGITAL FUTURE ◀

Consumers want to shop with a business in as enjoyable, easy, and efficient a manner as possible. The challenge to

retailers is to create superb shopping experiences. Argos is another innovative company focusing on putting their customers' experiences first. The UK retailer uses customer feedback to refine product offerings and improve the shopping experience in-store by ensuring the same valuable CGC is available to its retail customers. **Steel on the evolving channel landscape:**

“The landscape of retail in the UK and globally is changing. Customers are, more than ever before, empowered to shop how they want to, when they want to, and interact with brands in so many different ways. And I think because of the technology that you see on the screen, customers' expectations of the interaction that they can have with retailers is rising rapidly.”

HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM THE UK ◀

Argos is the UK multichannel retailer par excellence. In 2011, multichannel sales comprised 46% of their total sales. Whether online, through a mobile-optimized site, or via mobile applications for iOS and Android, Argos serves consumers wherever they choose to shop.

Developing new multichannel strategies and partnering with Bazaarvoice allowed Argos to excel in new areas of

growth. Mark Steel, Digital Operations Director, Argos Ltd., shared how Argos developed their recent initiative to create a seamless digital experience for holiday shoppers with a mobile app:

“The holiday Christmas period is incredibly important for us. We do the vast majority of our annual sales over that third quarter. So Christmas is really important for us.

So it’s already big for us. That’s just smartphones, not tablets. And we started thinking about -- how could we create a really great experience for our customers at Christmas?

We typically release a gift catalog, a Christmas gift guide over the holiday season. And we started to think about -- how could we create something that’s really useful, create something that takes some of the pain out of Christmas shopping, and do all of that on a mobile?

We came up with an idea called “digital gift finder” . . . effectively replacing or complementing that paper Christmas catalog [on a] mobile phone. So it was effectively like having a gift guide in your pocket with you, wherever you were, wherever you wanted to shop. And most importantly of all, we wanted gift finder to be intelligent, so it wasn’t just showing you a whole long list of products that you might be interested in, but actually, it was starting to

learn from the things that you said you liked or you didn’t like for your gift recipient—we start to learn from that, and show you intelligent recommendations.

We couldn’t have imagined, actually, how successful it was going to be. It didn’t exist back in 2013. It was a bit of a test for us, if I’m honest. We had, in those 10 weeks, over 1 million customer visits to our digital gift finder, over a million in just 10 weeks, and over 60 million products were viewed and liked or disliked. So 60 million product opinions expressed by customers in 10 weeks.

We didn’t start even by thinking about mobile. We started by saying, “We can help customers at Christmas. We can take some of the pain out of Christmas shopping, and then think about how we can do it.” So in terms of creating connected experiences, seamless experiences, for me, it’s really important to think about the customer value first, and then the channel comes second to that. [That was a great example] for us.”

Argos sells general merchandise and products for the home from over 700 stores throughout the UK and Republic of Ireland, online, and over the telephone. It serves over 130 million customers a year through its stores, takes four million customer orders either online or over the phone, and is part of Home Retail Group, the UK’s leading home and general merchandise retailer.

[Learn more about Argos and their work.](#)



OPEN YOUR EYES – VISUAL CONTENT IS CHANGING THE GAME

Guess what? The selfie is not a fad – it's a selling opportunity.

Oh the selfie stick... who could have ever imagined that it would become such a significant thing? Every consumer, and even businesses, undoubtedly creates and views these social-generated photographs. In fact, nearly 75% of all Internet users are active on social channels today—sharing opinions, ideas, thoughts, and pieces of their lives on social networks. As a result, consumer creation and sharing of product-related photographs is skyrocketing as more than 100 million photos are posted to Instagram and Twitter each day.

Brands are facing a new opportunity to connect with consumers through a more visual and emotional method: CGC in the form of social photographs. Brands must integrate social photographs into the marketing mix to remain relevant and achieve a marketing presence. For example, Clinique saw a 4% increase in conversion rates on pages showcasing curated social imagery. Even more significantly, the brand experienced a 26% increase in engagement as they began tracking people who visited and interacted with that page. Social imagery is not only transforming online and retail commerce, but also influencing other industries to adopt the power of visual commerce.

TRANSFORMING CONCEPTS OF SELLING: JAGUAR ◀

The automotive industry represents one of the most visually-driven markets. The term “curb appeal” originally referred to a home’s ability to be visually appealing after initial inspection. Now this term applies to anything that looks nice at first glance. Logically, the automotive industry would be the first to embrace the notion of visual commerce and CGC as an influencer on sales. According to **Ray Warren, Digital and Social Media Marketing Manager, Jaguar**, they see social imagery has a huge opportunity:



“When shoppers get excited about the car, they’re posting pictures while they’re in the dealership. They’re posting pictures while they’re at the park. They’re posting pictures on a night out. They’re posting pictures while they’re cruising down Santa Monica Boulevard in L.A. just letting people know how great, and how appreciative they are for this vehicle. This is actually transforming how Jaguar is going to go-to-market in the next couple of months, bringing this content to the users at an above the line, below the line, and even on a CRM perspective. ”

TRANSFORMING CONCEPTS OF SELLING: SPECTRUM BRANDS ◀

Spectrum Brands' word-of-mouth programs aren't successful by chance: the company actively seeks to interact with customers throughout the purchase process and across a variety of communications channels. The success they found by utilizing ratings and reviews, product sampling, and additional forms of consumer-generated content, spurred the company to seek out additional opportunities to drive brand visibility in a unique way. This led them to get involved with the dynamic changes within men's beard fashion, which is currently enjoying a growing contingent of men who like to maintain a full face of hair. And, yes, "competitive bearding" is a sport in which individuals compete to have the most uniquely-styled facial hair.

With this popular trend in full swing, Remington sponsored the World Beard and Moustache Championships and supported six competitors on their individual journeys to become the World Beard Champion. Dubbed the Remington Beard Boss team, these competitors drove across the country driving awareness for their passion. In the process, the Remington's Beard Boss campaign changed the stale perception of the brand from "your grandfather's razor" to a hip beard styler and trimmer that garnered the attention of a younger generation of consumers.

The voice of the customer has never been stronger.

This intersection of authentic customer reviews with emotive social posts and media represents the future of truly social commerce online.



CONCLUSION

WINNING THE RACE ◀

No business, retailer, or manufacturer could have imagined that commerce would evolve into its current state. If there is one constant in today's marketplace, it is that the traditional notions of marketing are being completely disrupted. The emergence of mobile as the dominant tool for communication; the evolution of SEO; the ever-changing consumer behavior and expectations: these are the trends that have made the race between companies that much more competitive.

More than that, we know consumers place more trust and faith in the opinions of their peers than they do in those of brands. The voice of the consumer continues to be the most powerful tool any company can wield. The companies that take advantage of this fact will win the race.

Bazaarvoice is a network that connects brands and retailers to the authentic voices of people where they shop.

Each month, more than 700 million people view and share authentic opinions, questions and experiences about tens of millions of products in the Bazaarvoice network.

Our technology platform amplifies these voices into the places that influence purchase decisions. Network analytics help marketers and advertisers provide more engaging experiences that drive brand awareness, consideration, sales and loyalty.

To learn more, [visit www.Bazaarvoice.com](http://www.Bazaarvoice.com)

