

Can User-Generated Content be our Best Marketing Tool?

Remember those days when marketers needed to think about 100% of the content used in brand communication? They are long gone. With each day that passes, users perceive even less importance of carefully selected marketing material by brands. The contemporary frenzy now is for user-generated content.

For some time now, marketers have understood this new reality: our customers are increasingly turning to each other during a decision-making process. Customers now control many moments in the customer journey, as well as much of the content that shapes the way other users shop.

Welcome to the age of user-generated content

Ratings, reviews, videos, blogs, forum posts, digital images, and audio files are some examples of shapes that this user-generated content may appear. The performance that this content reaches is superior to all the warranties produced by brands, this trend is illustrated in the following statistics:

- 86% of consumers say authenticity is important when deciding which brands to support, and 60% of consumers rate user-generated content as the most authentic form of content (Stackla, 2017).
- 70% of US consumers say they are more likely to buy a product after seeing a positive or consumer-related image online (Olapic, 2017).
- 73% of consumers say user-generated content increases their purchase confidence and 65% say it is more engaging than brand-created marketing (TurnTo, 2017).

Why should you use user-generated content?

User-generated content is a modern name for a concept that has been around for a long time. People have always asked for referrals from friends, family, and neighbors. The scope was broadened by all that digital technologies we now have access to insights from neighbors who live on the other side of the planet. And the best part is: people love it.

User-generated content provides shoppers with all the information they need to make informed purchasing decisions. This new way of sharing information is new, fast, and constantly

expanding. Think about it: everyone has an opinion, and a surprising number of people are willing to share them online.

What are the benefits and risks of user-generated content?

Even though user-generated content may speed up brand recognition, the wrong content can slow it down. In general, people tend to complain faster than they praise, for example, dissatisfied customers are nearly three times more likely to tweet about their complaints than satisfied customers.

User-generated content can also generate legal risks, such as ownership and licensing, privacy, monetization, and misrepresentation. To address these potential issues, it is recommended that you create digital policies that prevent marketers from deciding on what can and cannot be used every day.

A lot of things can go wrong, so you should have, at least, a governance manual that guides employees on how to deal with potential complications. Companies need to understand what permissions or rights they have to use user-generated content, and also they need a way to deal with potential issues related to this content.

What are the best practices for user-generated content?

User-generated content helps build trust in a brand, so marketers should make the most of it by following some simple guidelines. By incorporating your customers' opinions, you show that you are open and willing to listen.

However, it is important to manage it correctly. To guide you through the best ways on using user-generated content, we developed three tips on how you can make the most of it:

- Ask the author for permission before incorporating user-generated content into your marketing strategy. Contrary to what many people say, not everything on the internet is free for indiscriminate use. To avoid legal problems, it's better to just assume that all content is copyrighted and ask the author before using it.
- Don't assume that the person who posted an image of your product was the person who took the photo. Specifically, ask for the source of the image so you can get permission from the right person.
- Be generous with your appreciation, even if you have permission to reuse the content, credibility, and trust by giving credit to the person who created it. This is also a great way to build a sense of community among your customers and demonstrates that you not only enjoy their active participation but also value their thoughts and content.

With these simple guidelines, you can expand your marketing reach exponentially with all the power from user-generated content.