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Introduction

Despite skepticism among consumers, cultivating trust remains a critical priority for marketers, as high levels of trust are associated with an 18% increase in loyalty and a 40% increase in preference (see [“Improving Brand Trust in Untrusting Times”](#)).¹ According to Gartner surveys, consumer trust in big brands declined from 65% in 2016 to 53% in 2018. If a consumer trusts a company, they are 93% more likely to recommend that company, 92% more likely to buy their products or services and 88% more likely to spend more money.² To demonstrate trustworthiness and authenticity in an oversaturated marketplace, digital marketing leaders should encourage consumers to create content, also known as user-generated content (UGC). Over 80% of consumers reported that UGC improves product discovery, generates brand trust and creates a more engaging experience.³ Deploying UGC is an easy and cost-effective way for marketers to improve loyalty metrics, leverage passionate consumers and strengthen credibility.

The challenge, however, is creating the right mix of brand-owned and user-generated content that shows authenticity without deviating from the brand’s voice and visual standards. Two distinct approaches can be taken for UGC: cultivated and curated. Cultivated UGC requires a branded campaign or challenge that incentivizes customers to participate in posting branded content on social media. Curated UGC involves taking unsolicited relevant content and using it on branded platforms (see [“How to Create Content That Succeeds on Social Media”](#)). UGC that generates high traffic and engagement blends both types of content throughout the shopping journey, including the path to purchase on the brand site, as well as on social media channels.

Key Findings

- User-generated content (UGC) helps marketers build consumer trust, maintain authenticity and engage with current and potential consumers.
- Marketers adopt UGC at varying rates and deploy UGC at different points along the path to purchase. Across sectors,⁴ 55% of brands have ratings and reviews on product pages, 24% feature additional UGC on product pages outside of reviews and 27% display UGC on homepages or on other brand pages.
- UGC pages that demonstrate efficacy and drive traffic combine curated and cultivated content throughout the shopping journey, including the brand site and social media channels.

Key Recommendations

- Strengthen authenticity and guide consumer purchasing decisions by integrating UGC into ratings and reviews, product pages and homepages.
- Deploy content from Instagram, or source content directly from customers for the brand site to drive traffic and demonstrate product efficacy.
- To drive Instagram engagement, incentivize users to create content through challenges and brand hashtags. Incorporate UGC within Instagram check-out.

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Citations

1. 2016 Gartner Trust and Skepticism Survey, 2018 Gartner Cultural Attitudes and Behaviors Survey
2. "Trends in Consumer Trust." Salesforce.
3. "Why Social Commerce Isn't #Trending Yet," Retail Dive.
4. Sectors Include Beauty, Hotels, Speciality Retail, Department Stores and Luxury

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