

Furniture News

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Issue 267 | June 2011



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Gearing
Media
Group

By Richard Wood



Reviewing experiences when buying online is becoming more and more popular, with customers able to discuss their transactions on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as on many forums popping up which are solely dedicated to providing somewhere to share product and service stories. Many larger retailers, including several that sell furniture, are also providing a space for their customers to post reviews – but what does this mean for furniture retailers with both online stores and physical showrooms?

The importance of a glowing review

Online reviews are valuable because they can help a business discover what it is doing well, and highlight areas where it may need to improve. Great reviews will also drive online and offline sales, and the reassurance of their peers is particularly valuable to the younger demographic – reports of personal experience speak to people much more than biased adverts.

As independent third party reviews are a crucial element of today's e-commerce store, providing an element of integrity and trust to customers, many e-commerce owners are now also finding that the widespread use of social media can create problems.

There are typically two situations which commonly arise. The first results from a customer having a poor – or apparently poor – experience from the store in question. The second is malicious posts with no foundation in fact.

From a business owner's perspective it is vital to keep on top of all tweets and wallposts, submissions on their review systems, and on all internet postings on their companies through inbound alert mechanisms – such as Google Alerts – and deal with the former as fast as possible.

With the purse strings still tight many consumers are reading review after review before they make that crucial decision of buying larger, more expensive goods, such as furniture. One step better is if their friend has recommended or shared a link with them – that review from someone they trust is better than any other review online.

Recent research shows that 53% of shoppers have

decided against making a purchase based on a negative online review – that shows the potential that reviews have to lose retailers half of their potential business! Half of those asked also indicated that online recommendations are the most influential factor in their buying decisions, more so than any advertising campaign or promotion.

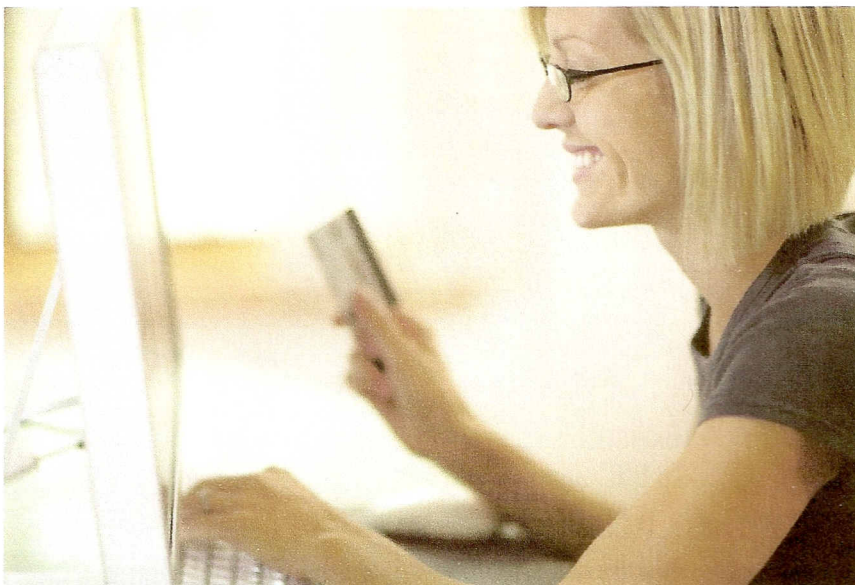
“The democratic nature of reviews may scare many retailers, but handled correctly they can be invaluable in driving sales”

Elsewhere, further research has showed that retailers that embrace reviews and recommendations into their online strategy can expect an uplift of up to 18%, which is an unprecedented potential in the current climate. I think this illustrates the true potential of how managing reviews effectively can establish increased customer confidence, increase website traffic and improve the return from customers.

Meanwhile, negative reviews are unfortunate – but the way in which they are dealt with is key. The catch with social media means that brands need to be transparent, as, for sites like Twitter, all users can see your responses. A good reply is invaluable in sending the message to customers that your brand cares, but each answer must be considered to help to reinstate your brand's message.

There have been examples in the past of brands who have responded to customer criticism inappropriately, and the result has been a public relations disaster. Without doubt, the Internet is a powerful tool, and has given everyone a voice, and many resources with which customers can communicate directly with companies and brands.

The democratic nature of reviews may scare many retailers, but handled correctly they can be invaluable in driving sales, and can really project the right image and give a voice to your brand.



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