

The new social purchase journey



Introduction

Shopping has always been social. Since the first transactions in the earliest marketplaces, people bought from people – and discussed their decisions with other people.

But the first era of ecommerce dispensed with all that. As shopping became de-personalised, we all browsed clinical product pages, clicked through isolated, human-free purchase paths... and left all-too-many shopping baskets abandoned.

Today, social commerce is back in a big way. Retailers have embraced the power of the crowd, and it's hard to find a serious commerce site that doesn't have some form of reviews, recommendations or user-generated content.

It's not rocket science: social commerce works because it brings the human element back, so that every purchase is the result of a complex network of conversations between friends, fellow shoppers, and representatives of manufacturer and retailer.

Yet many companies are missing out on the full potential of social commerce by only using basic review software, only on a handful of pages on their site. Instead of really engaging with consumers on their own sites and across the web – learning more about their customers and their market in the process – they're doing the bare minimum, and seeing results to match.

The real winners in the social age will be those who harness the full power of the crowd not just on their own site, but through the entire purchase journey.

That's what this ebook is all about: weaving social engagement into every step of the new purchase journey to make it easy for people to buy your products or services – and to share their great experience with others.

The ideas discussed here are based on our experience as a world-leading social commerce company. Because we see so many crowd-powered transactions across so many different retailer, brand and social websites, we have a unique perspective on consumer behaviour. By sharing it, we hope to help marketers raise their game – which also helps consumers find the very best retailer, products and services for their specific needs. Win-win.

“Customers have been providing user-generated content for a decade through reviews, forum posts, uploading photos, etc. Sharing tools now enable more eyeballs to see this fab content, and even better, the eyeballs know the fingers who created the content.”

Linda Bustos
GetElastic

The old purchase journey

It's hard to believe, but only a few years ago, the online purchase journey was a pretty straight line. We knew what we wanted; we trusted a few, select web retailers; and we bought.

Seems almost quaint, doesn't it?

The old idea of a sales funnel that the marketer drives from start to finish has given way to something new.

The new purchase journey

Today's consumer purchase journeys are multi-channel, multi-step pathways that reflect the unique motivations and dynamics of each specific purchase.

From the outside, it looks like the map of a pinball: random, chaotic, rudder-less. But from the buyer's perspective, each purchase journey is actually a fairly logical, goal-directed exploration of the web's rich content universe and the wide range of mobile and offline touchpoints.

Of course, no two purchase journeys are identical. There are as many unique purchase paths as there are online transactions (and that's a lot).

But, as diverse as these journeys may be, a pattern is emerging that lets us distil some principles from this mess.

The new purchase journey is:



Fast

With all the channels available to them, people can continue their research on the move and outside offline business hours. The result? The whole purchase journey is speeding up.

If you can't respond quickly to behaviour that signals the intent to buy, you're out of the game.



Search-enabled

Many purchase journeys start with a search engine, but nearly all involve several searches, whether on Google or an on-site search.

You need to understand your keyword dynamics and make sure your site is optimised with plenty of social content.



Social

Above all, today's purchase journey is social – fuelled by reviews, recommendations, 'Ask an owner' services, Facebook visits and Twitter queries.

You need to master social commerce content – on your own site and beyond.

Today's purchase journeys aren't always confined to the web. Offline channels – from branded retail stores to the big box retailers, kiosks and traditional advertising – still play their part. And mobile apps are playing an increasingly important 'bridging' role between online and offline touchpoints.

The most progressive marketers are deploying integrated, multi-channel campaigns that combine online, offline and mobile into a seamless journey.

The new purchase journey is:



Complex

From the initial research to the final transaction, most purchase journeys involve much more than just a single visit to one website. And the more expensive or important the item, the more complex the process.

You need to be ready to convert interest into action in many different ways.



Buyer-driven

Yesterday's path was heavily guided by the vendor. Today's is buyer-initiated and self-directed. You can influence it, but you can't drive it.

The key is to be helpful to the shopper, making it easy for them to find exactly what they need instead of trying to frog-march them to the checkout.



Multi-channel

Today's purchase journeys hop from search engine to social site to price comparison engine to mobile app, bricks-and-mortar store and back. They often involve multiple retailer and manufacturer sites, plus review sites, expert blogs and mobile services.

You need to be in the right place at the right time with the right content.

“The reality is that just like most other things in life, there is no one thing that makes something happen. People use a variety of methods to make decisions using a combination of tools and resources.”

Frank Reed
Marketing Pilgrim

The new purchase journey

Without ignoring the incredible diversity of purchase journeys, it is possible to represent the entire decision cycle in a simplified model that breaks the journey down into four decision steps and four research stages.

The key decisions and research stages

Each of the four decision points either triggers or is triggered by a research phase. The decision points are, as the name implies, moments in time when people's mindsets move to the next level of the purchase cycle. The research stages are more prolonged and might extend over days, weeks or months.

Identify a need

The moment you realise there's a product out there that might be just what you need.

Intent decision

The moment when you realise that, yes, you are going to buy something and do it soon.

Product decision

You've made your mind up. You want the XL-420 in beige with the left-handed widget option. Definitely.

Purchase

You've found the right product at the right retailer and you've gone for it. Congratulations.



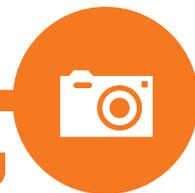
Need shaping

The stage in which you start to add dimension to your desires and start to picture the thing you aim to buy.



Product shortlisting

Where you start to narrow down your choices, first in big chunks, then down to a list of two or three options.



Supplier selection

Now where do you buy the XL-420? A known retailer or a low-price vendor you've never heard of?



Post-purchase validation

Now you need reassurance that you did the right thing (if only to justify it to your partner or family).

Your experience may vary

Of course, there is no such purchase journey in real life.

Some journeys proceed in an orderly way through each of these steps. Others start with the supplier (*"I think I'll go to Zappo's for some shoes"*); the product (*"I need an iPad and I need it now"*); or the manufacturer (*"It's time for my next BMW"*).

Some journeys go from left to right in the model, others swim upstream or dance around.

It's still useful to analyse a generic purchase journey model, because it helps us see that:

- Each stage has its own buyer needs and its own set of questions
- Each involves different kinds of resources
- Each requires a different approach for marketers
- Each needs a different kind of social commerce content

“In highly complex sales situations, participants in the buying process come and go. They may enter the process at the stage of needs specification, only to depart when alternatives are evaluated, or they may participate only when demonstrations are given, for example.”

Dr Jeff Tanner
MyCustomer

The purchase journey question map

What are the key touchpoints as people move through the purchase journey?

The implications

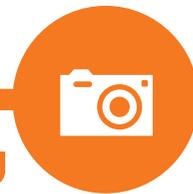
If people ask different questions as they progress through their purchase journey, shouldn't you have different kinds of answers for them? And shouldn't you know where they go to get help?

Identify a need

Intent decision

Product decision

Purchase



Need shaping

What's out there?
Can I afford one?
What features matter?
How important is it?
How urgent is it?
Who else buys this?

Product shortlisting

What brands feel right?
Which model is best?
Which can I afford?
What do owners think?
What do experts think?
Will this model be replaced soon?

Supplier selection

Where should I buy?
Where can I get the best deal?
Who do I trust?
Who will support me best?
Who has the happiest customers?

Post-purchase validation

Did I make the right decision?
Did I get a good price?
Who can help me make the most of the product?
Can I help other shoppers the way people helped me?

The purchase journey resource map

What channels and tools do people use at each stage of the purchase journey?

Identify a need

Intent decision

Product decision

Purchase



Need shaping

Product shortlisting

Supplier selection

Post-purchase validation

Search engines
Social networks
Talk to friends
Expert media

Manufacturers' websites
Retailer websites
Social networks
Comparison sites
Expert media

Retailer websites
Social networks
Comparison sites
Bricks and mortar stores

Social networks
Expert sites
Final purchase site

The social commerce dividend

Social commerce refers to any time advice or interactions with other consumers or brands are used to help people make a purchase. That advice can come in many forms, including

- Product ratings and reviews
- Reviews of suppliers' delivery and service
- Shopper-to-purchaser Q&As
- Brand interaction forums
- Social media sites

The power of social content as a way to increase engagement along the whole purchase path is supported by extensive research and the first-hand experience of the overwhelming majority of online retailers.

This consumer engagement delivers significant benefits all through the customer lifecycle, including

Increased traffic through providing content that search engines love (our research indicates around a third more)

Increased conversion rates as more people have the confidence to purchase (up to twice as high)

Increased order value as each shopper spends more (with an average 5% uplift)

Happier customers because they made the right choice

Fewer returns and less lost revenue

Improved loyalty and higher lifetime value from all of the above

Better customer insight when you listen and engage with purchasers

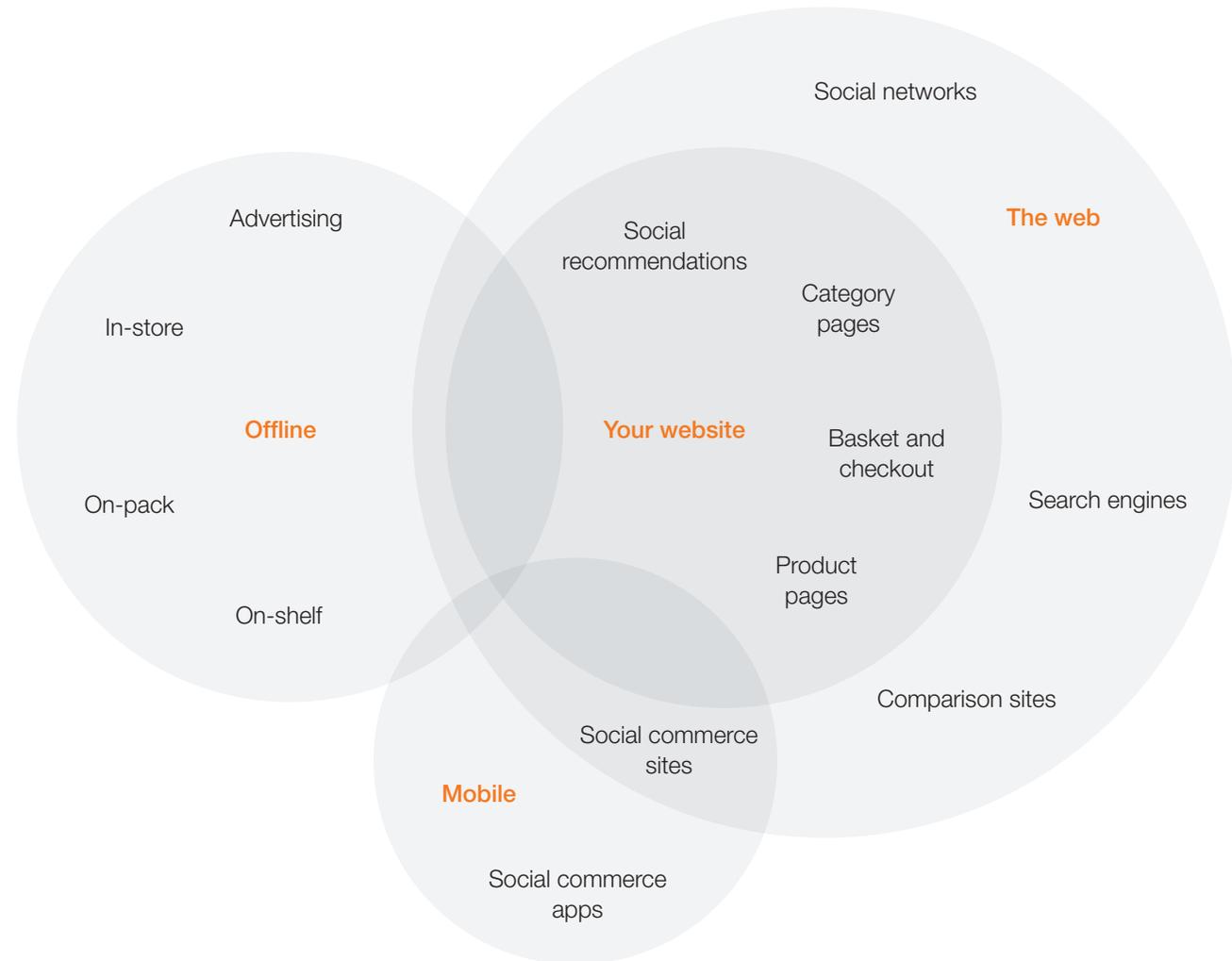
We won't bury you in statistics here, but if you need some data to support a business case, give us a call.

Conversion rates increase by 177% when consumers engage with social content.

Reevoo Insight research, 2011

The social commerce spheres of influence

Most companies understand the importance of reviews. But plenty of them ignore the full range of places where social content can make an impact. Just as the new purchase journey involves many different kinds of social content, it also spans multiple channels, including:



45% of UK consumers use their mobiles to research purchases on the move

Fly Research online survey, Sept 2011

Your website

The only place you fully control and the most important place for a well-executed social commerce strategy.

Think about

Product ratings and reviews on product pages and category pages

Service ratings and reviews on the home page and checkout pages

Socialised product recommendations (“People who viewed this, bought this...”)

Consumer Q&A service on product pages

A Brand Response channel for joining the dialogue

Using ratings and reviews in emails

Mobile devices

Mobiles are fast becoming a major stop on an increasing number of purchase journeys. And the younger the user, the more likely they are to consult their mobile. Social content that ignores the mobile channel is missing an important opportunity.

Think about

Making sure your social content transfers to your mobile web pages

Creating mobile apps that encourage social shopping

Helping in-store users access ratings and reviews on their smartphones (with a simple QR code on-shelf)

The wider web

You need to extend your social content beyond the confines of your site, to reach out to people at all stages of the purchase journey.

Think about

Making it easy for people to publish reviews to Facebook and Twitter

Ensuring social commerce content is search-engine friendly to boost rankings

Broadcasting your reviews to comparison sites, publishers and blogs

Featuring social commerce content on your social media pages

Offline

Social commerce content is making an impact in the ‘bricks and mortar’ world too, as companies extend their great reviews offline.

Think about

Putting product ratings and reviews on packaging, POS materials and on-shelf

Using digital signage for real-time review feeds in-store

Promoting your service ratings and reviews in-store

Using ratings and reviews in advertising

In one typical case, email click through rates improved 46% through the inclusion of review scores.

Fly Research online survey, 2011

Social content and SEO

Check out our free ebook on using social content to enhance your SEO strategy for lots of tips on improving rankings and increasing traffic.

[Download it here.](#)

Socialising your conversion funnel

As we take a closer look at the journey within your own website, the 'funnel' metaphor can become useful again. But many businesses ignore most of this on-site funnel when deploying social commerce solutions – confining reviews to just a few pages. The best performers spread social content throughout their websites, encouraging and accelerating the sales process.

- 1 Landing pages**
Keyword-rich social content boosts traffic and earns the click-through.
- 2 Category pages and product family**
Product reviews at the category and product family level inject trust at the start of the navigation path.
- 3 Configuration**
Product configuration pages can be socialised with consumer Q&A.
- 4 Product page**
Product reviews and social recommendations can increase conversion and boost order values.
- 5 Basket**
Service reviews minimise abandonment by removing last-minute doubts.

Socialising the entire purchase journey

The implications

Social content can make an impact far beyond the product pages on your site – if your social commerce strategy uses this precious content everywhere.

Identify a need



Need shaping

Phase 1

- Product reviews optimised for search
- Reviews shared on social media sites
- Review content on mobile devices

Intent decision



Product shortlisting

Phase 2

- Product reviews and ratings on your site
- Three-way conversation with browsers, customers and your team
- Social product recommendations
- Review content on mobile devices
- Broadcasting reviews to comparison sites and expert media
- Review content on social media sites

Product decision



Supplier selection

Phase 3

- Service reviews on site, in-store and on mobile
- Product reviews and ratings
- Three-way conversation with browsers, customers and your team
- Social network presence with social content
- In-store and on-pack social content

Purchase



Post-purchase validation

Phase 4

- Review content on site and on social sites
- Proactive post-purchase review request
- Social sharing of reviews
- Invitation to participate in buyer-to-shopper Q&A

Go forth and socialise

If you've taken one thing away from this ebook, we hope it's this: the new purchase journey works much harder for you if you can inject social commerce content at every stage and in all spheres of influence.

We hope the social purchase journey model also proves useful as you think about where you can engage consumers and what kind of content is most effective at each step and stage.

Finally, we hope we've widened your idea of what social commerce can be – it starts with product reviews but extends much further, into service reviews, social recommendations and three-way conversations between shoppers, customers and your team – used on your site, across the web, on mobile devices and offline.

At Reevoo, we're passionate about social commerce, and its potential to help businesses get to know their customers better, so they can attract, engage and retain customers in the short and long term. And we understand how to adapt social tools to achieve businesses' desired results, and help businesses adapt to a consumer's individual purchase journey. So do get in touch – we'd love the opportunity to take you through our unique approach and show how it can help you drive new revenue.

“Social media is now a ‘wherever I am’ option, integrated into the mobile-plus-social-media users’ shopping experience and habits; 27% compare or check prices, 24% refer to reviews for brands/ places/services”

Neil Glassman
Social Times

*Figures from ‘The Faces of Social Media’,
Knowledge Networks, 2010*

About Reevoo

Conversations about your business are already taking place across the web and offline, shaping consumer opinions. Reevoo enables you to join those conversations so you can attract, engage and retain more customers. Our social commerce suite provides reviews, recommendations and community solutions that have an immediate impact on your bottom line, and turn feedback into insights that can guide your business.

More than 750,000,000 Reevoo-collected reviews and conversations are used every month across 18 countries. Founded in 2005, Reevoo has pioneered a unique social commerce model that continues to deliver far better results than the industry standard for brands including Sony, Ford, Dixons, Orange, Kuoni and Kelkoo.

“Reevoo protects our
brand integrity and
increases our conversion
rates at the same time”

Sony Europe

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