

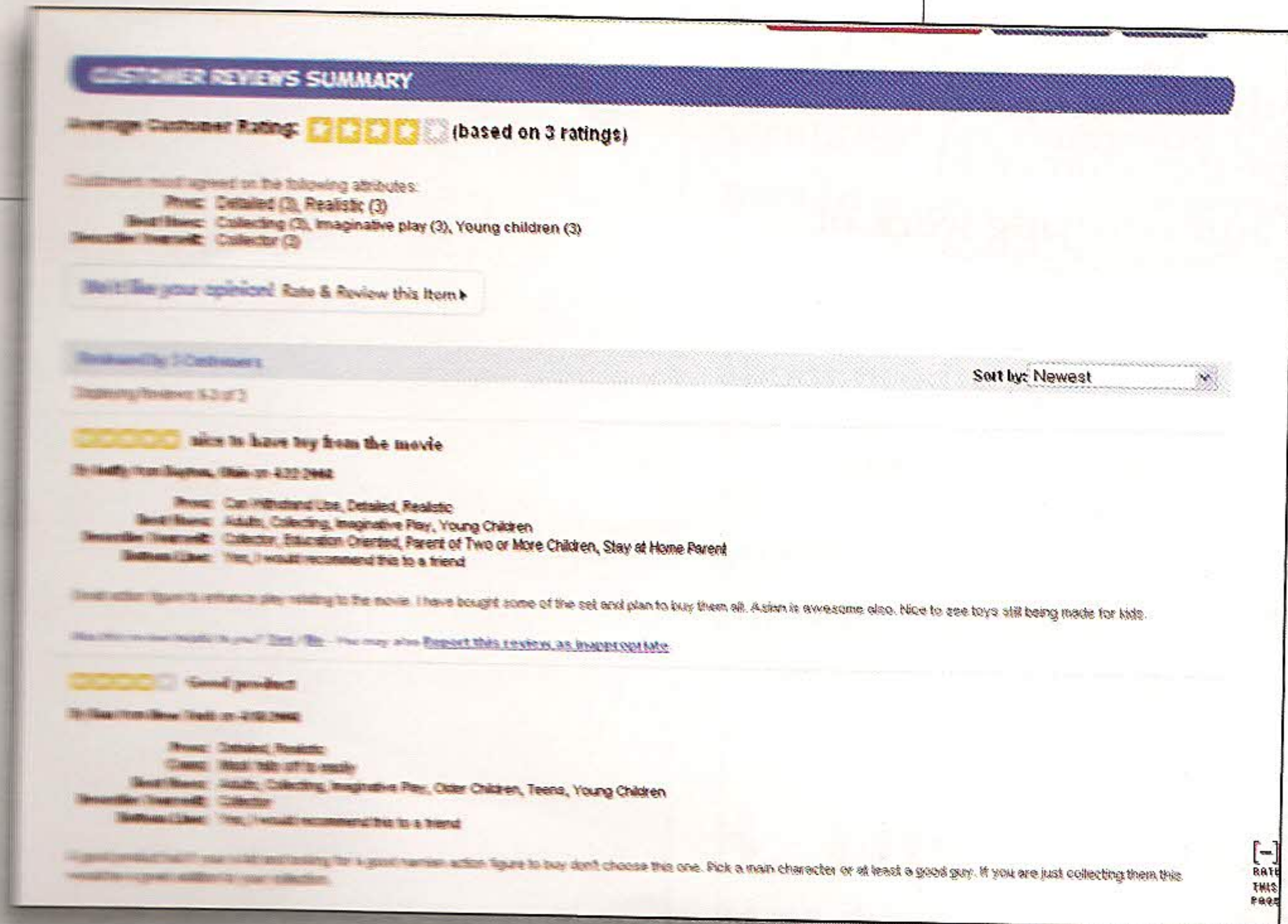
# Rave reviews

## Five-star advice for maximising on-site customer ratings and reviews



By Jill Culbertson

ToysRUs.com adds value by breaking review attributes down into pros, cons, best uses, and bottom line.



**C**ustomer ratings and reviews are becoming commonplace on ecommerce sites. But not all of those websites are getting the most out of these reviews and maximising their business potential.

Etailers such as Amazon and eBay have been using customer ratings for years to increase conversions and sales. But the value of ratings and reviews goes beyond conversions. In a November 2008 eConsultancy survey of 360 website owners, 77 percent said ratings and reviews increased traffic, and 42 percent said they contributed to an increase in average transaction value.

Customers have also realised the value of reviews. According to a 2008 Razorfish survey, 61 percent of customers relied on customer reviews for product information in advance of making any buying decisions.

It's little wonder, then, that those retailers whose websites don't yet include customer reviews are rushing to add them to their sites. But implementing rating and review technology on your website will not result in an immediate uptake of consumers using the system, nor will you see an immediate uplift in conversion. Leveraging product reviews from customers requires an effort on the part of the retailer to market it to their customers. The following golden rules of customer reviews will help you to reap the rewards:

### 1) Make it as easy as possible for a user to leave a rating/review.

Requiring users to register on your site before they can leave a review places an immediate barrier in their way. Reviews provide a site with much-needed additional product content that will enhance search engine optimisation and conversion; whether the person leaving the review is a registered customer or not is irrelevant!

### 2) Provide easily accessible instructions or guidelines.

One recent survey declared that 83 percent of online shoppers are interested in submitting reviews. It is important, however, to ensure that these customers are comfortable in doing so. To increase their confidence, take them through a review step by step, providing clear guidelines and even examples of past reviews. Ensure that customers are also advised of the area of the website that they need to navigate to if they have any type of customer services issues. This will help ensure that your customer reviews remain useful and focused.

Providing predefined rating attributes applicable to the product will help encourage users and provide as much value as possible to the ratings. The US website for Toys 'R' Us, for example, includes "Pros", "Cons", "Best Uses", and "Bottom Line" among its review attributes to help guide customers, though it also allows reviewers to create their own ratings attributes, which further enhances the value and relevancy of the review.

### 3) Encourage or remind customers to leave reviews.

Customer reviews should be regularly solicited to ensure that customers become accustomed to leaving them (as well as reading them) as a part of the standard purchase process. After-sales emails to remind customers to leave a review should be a minimum standard. Let your customers know that you need their help and what positive effects providing their feedback can have for them—if, for example, you use their information to improve your merchandise selection or service options.

### 4) Incorporate social-media/viral-sharing options.

Incorporating social-media buttons, such as links to Facebook and Digg, in your review section will encourage users to share their reviews with their friends and family via their online social networks. Encouraging sharing of reviews in this manner immediately widens the visibility of the reviews to beyond the audience of your own website.



### 5) Enhance your website navigation by incorporating a “sort by rating” option.

Making it easier for users to sort products by ratings also makes it easier for them to buy. An Argos case study concluded that the inclusion of a “sort by rating” navigation option resulted in a 176 percent increase in conversions.

### 6) Provide an average review/rating summary.

Scrolling through dozens of customer reviews can become tedious, so having some aggregate information or average ratings displayed within the product description can provide users with enough information to increase the chances of conversion without users having to take any additional steps. This also ensures that the reviews are highly visible to customers at the time they are making their purchasing decisions.

### 7) Aggregate information and keywords from reviews.

Ratings alone are not as useful at conveying subjective consumer reviews; however, displaying multiple customer reviews on one page can be very laborious for web users to trawl through. Take inspiration from the likes of Toys R Us, which aggregates the most frequently used keywords from reviews to give users a flavour of the product reviews.

### 8) Reward reviewers.

Whilst most people are happy to provide reviews and ratings, it is important to continue

To simplify the way reviews are presented, Firebox prominently displays an average score out of 5 within the product description.

to encourage them to do so. Think creatively about how you can reward your customers for leaving product reviews. Apparel brand the Gap rewarded the first customers to leave reviews on its site with a VIP icon next to their names on all product reviews they provide. Recognition and accolades can be enough of a reward, though if you are new to hosting customer reviews, you could consider a monetary reward—say, “Win the chance of receiving a £100 voucher by sharing a product review of your purchase”.

### 9) Listen and take action.

Regularly peruse all customer reviews and feed this information back into your company. Use the reviews as a product litmus test to determine which items your customers like and which they loathe. Then take steps to review your suppliers and your stock. Don't overlook the fact that your customers are also giving you a message, so take steps to acknowledge that you have heard and understood.

### 10) Display all reviews—good and bad.

Remember that when you allow ratings and reviews on your site, you are allowing all comments, disparaging as well as favourable. Happily, research has shown that where ratings and reviews are encouraged, most of them (88 percent in the UK), are positive. But negative reviews provide authenticity and a higher degree of trust in the opinions of those who have written the reviews. (See “The good news about bad reviews”, below.)

Ratings and reviews have proven to provide businesses with increased conversion rates, improved search engine optimisation, and customer insight. Yet these benefits can be realised only if businesses manage the reviews process properly.

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## The good news about bad reviews

Many websites that still don't feature customer reviews are baulking because of concerns about negative feedback. But negative reviews are also actually good for business on a number of levels. For one thing, they offer an unbiased view, and as a result give a website and a brand authenticity. Would you believe a list of five-star

reviews with no criticisms? No, neither would I.

Negative reviews also play a role in increasing conversion. Consumers often seek out the poor reviews of products to determine if the negatives are minor problems that they could live with or serious issues. Quite often seeing that the only negatives are minor ones will

seal the deal for a sale.

And believe it or not, negative reviews can save you money. The cost of customer returns will drop as customers are more likely to have received a more comprehensive product description before placing their order and are therefore less likely to return the item. As a result your customer

satisfaction levels will increase.

You can use negative comments to merchandise your site and suggest more-suitable alternatives to customers. If a frequent comment is poor quality, for example, display a “you might also like” product option of a higher-quality brand of the same product.—JC