

Small Business News & Notes



How To Use Online Reviews To Invest In The Best Technology For Your Office

by Mark DiGiammarino

(NAPS)—Anyone who's in charge of purchasing technology for a small business knows there's a bit of alchemy in the procurement process: You apply instinct. You ask your colleagues for advice. You research what the critics in the magazines say. Increasingly, you're also reading the online reviews on specialized sites.

Reading online reviews is a logical extension of how people once bought goods—through word of mouth. Technology, however, is even better, because it provides access to many more experienced.

Online reviews give depth and breadth. They explain the pros and cons of any product or experience. At their best, they're incredible tools, perhaps the best thing to have happened for consumers in decades. At their worst, they're a scam.

Consider this: A London journalist once created numerous fake reviews on a restaurant site and made his humble garden shed an opening-night restaurant hit.

As the manager of reviews for Capterra—a free site for software buyers to read objective and insightful reviews—I've learned how to navigate the world of online reviews. Here are four top tips:

Check to see if the site monitors its review: Confirm the site has an FAQ page with transparent policy statements. Does it clearly state how the site makes money? Check to see if there's a way to report fake reviews. Make sure the site screens and reads all reviews before they go live. If it doesn't monitor reviews—or offer a way to report the fakes—the site isn't there to help you.

It's essential to report fake reviews because the reviews community depends on honest participation. When users share reviews, they help you to learn from their discoveries. Fake reviews tear at the fundamental trust everyone in the community must have in each other when they read and share online reviews.



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Look for verified reviewers: Reviewers should be verified as being real people and actual customers. You'll also need to know if they're buying products for large enterprises or small businesses like yours. Knowing who's writing the reviews matters. As an example, think about when you're in the market for a new car, and you get a recommendation from a neighbor on the best vehicle to buy. Isn't it important to know if that neighbor prefers a plush, magisterial ride—or a sports car with tight handling for the side roads?

Verified reviewers should also be actual customers of the products they write about. No one likes a rubbernecker standing at the sidelines, making unqualified assessments. When users have either bought or demoed the product, however, they have something to say. They know the product's pros and cons. They're often passionate about the product and want to share their experiences with you.

Read the negative reviews but read them fairly: Make sure to understand what's truly behind a negative review—it could be that

one person's lemon is your lemonade on a hot day. For example, a honeymooner might not like a hotel that you, with kids, would consider a perfect vacation destination.

Negative reviews are most useful when you can find specific patterns: If most of the reviews say the company has an excellent product but substandard customer service, then take that into account before you decide to buy or move on.

Also, look for a vendor response: If the vendor hasn't responded to the negative reviews, then that's useful to know. When the business responds to the reviews—if, for example, it says it's working to improve customer service consider that a point in its favor.

Remember that negative reviews are also a snapshot in time. Take into account recency and don't fault a vendor for something that occurred two years ago, especially if the vendor has responded to the negative review.

Be open to discovering new product: At Capterra, it's common for a user to come to the site looking for a marquee-name software product. But after some research, that user may then decide upon software from a smaller, less well-known provider. Often, it's because the product is better priced and better suited to the user's business. And usually, it's because others in the reviews community thought it was a better product.

Those software vendors that have a smaller footprint in the marketplace may have more utility and suitability for you. Be open to the unexpected when you read reviews.

Finding the best reviews in a sea of bad ones is no small challenge, but online reviews offer you a chance to avoid the mistakes of others and gain from the wisdom inherent in online reviews. Use these tips to learn from reviewers who have honestly shared their positive and negative experiences. Use reviews to discover new products and services that can take your business to a new level.