

# THE ULTIMATE TECH MARKETER'S GUIDE TO USER REVIEWS

2021



This e-book will walk you through why you need peer reviews, how to get them, and how to use them to maximize your revenues in 2021 and beyond.

# CONTENTS

---

1. Why Peer to Peer Content is King for Enterprise Technology Marketing
2. Overcoming the Challenges of Collecting Quality Reviews
3. Where to Find Users
4. What to Include in Your B2B User Questionnaires
5. Six Departments in Your Company that Can Use Review Content to Increase Revenue
6. How to Leverage Negative User Reviews to Increase ROI
7. Conclusion



# Why Peer to Peer Content is King for Enterprise Technology Marketing

---

Prior to making a purchase, potential buyers look to sources other than the company website or sales rep to get their product information. This is why peer reviews are a major source of information for most software buyers today. Peer reviews enable buyers to get an objective, firsthand view of how a product works, its level of quality, and the various features or components being offered — before committing to buying the product.

## Why Peer Reviews Resonate with Enterprise Technology Professionals

---

Buyers are increasingly relying on digital resources and review websites for research about technology, with enterprise buyers now regularly using peer reviews as a major purchasing influencer. According to a recent report, almost [70% of the B2B buyer's journey](#) is done before a prospect ever contacts sales. In another survey, conducted in 2019 by [DemandBase](#), close to two thirds (61%) of B2B buyers said they rely more on peer recommendations and review sites than they did just a year earlier. The same research

noted that 35% of buyers seek input from peers and existing users within the first month of the purchase process.

When it comes to mission-critical software, buyers are acutely aware of the huge risks to their company, its customers and even to their own jobs, of choosing a solution that does not live up to the vendor's promises. Since peers have no vested interest, their experiences and opinions are considered more valuable and trustworthy than information from analysts and salespeople.

A Bain & Company partner, writing for the [Harvard Business Review](#), notes that “By the time a sales rep gets involved, buyers already have a wealth of information about company reputation, product

specifications and reviews of successes or failures.”

Consumers see peer reviews as their filter between what the companies want you to believe and what’s accurate about the products or services being sold. This is particularly true for the technology sector, where services or products can easily be hyped up, and competitors and their solutions trashed.

Vendor-generated materials often neglect the buyer’s need for an accountable assessment of features such as speed, integration, and functionality, which can only be accurately evaluated through long-term use, and not only based on a trial or POC.

Peer reviews help bridge this gap, providing the detailed information that potential users are looking for in the buying process.



## Peer Reviews Matter Now More Than Ever

As the worldwide upheavals of 2020 stretch into 2021 and likely beyond, there are fewer opportunities than ever for buyers to talk with their peers about their technology experiences. COVID-19 has significantly impacted tech conferences. [Out of 63 tech-related conferences](#) that were scheduled for 2020, 44 either took place online or were postponed. Likewise, many big-name events will not take place in 2021. The lack of in-person events and networking opportunities and the increase in remote work means that buyers must go online to find users of solutions that they are researching.

Another factor in the rise of peer reviews is the changing demographics of B2B buyers. By 2025, over 44% of the US workforce will be Millennials. Already, [Millennials](#) are making more and more of the tech purchasing decisions. Their proficiency in technology and reliance on social media, together with their increasing position as influencers, underscores the importance of digital channels for research purposes. 85% of millennials use social media to research products and services for their companies, with 17% saying peers or colleagues are the most important source in their research.

“  
Research consistently shows that the enterprise cybersecurity buyer really values the perspective of their peers more than any other... Working with IT Central Station really helps us deliver that customer perspective.  
”



Katie Curtin-Mestre  
VP Product,  
Content and Digital Marketing,  
A Public Cybersecurity Company

[Click to watch »](#)

# Overcoming the Challenges of Collecting Quality Reviews

---

Collecting real reviews for potential buyers can be challenging. As the leading review platform for B2B enterprise technology reviews, we understand the importance of user reviews in the B2B space as well as the best ways to collect them. Both our own research and research from the industry's leading technology analysts assert the importance of user generated content.

It has already been known for several years that [word-of-mouth recommendations](#) from peers influence over 90% of all B2B buying decisions.

But do buyers really trust the peer content that they read online? The numbers speak for themselves: [88% of consumers trust online reviews](#) as much as they trust personal recommendations. Corporate buyers, specifiers, and influencers tend to tune out traditional marketing communications, spending more time on [online research and getting information and advice from peers](#) and other trusted third-party sources.

How can technology vendors bridge this gap and provide potential buyers with B2B reviews that not only answer their questions of “Is this solution right for my company’s needs?”, but also answer questions such as, “Why is this solution the best option among its competitors?”

## A Little Distance Can Go a Long Way

---

Not all users are willing to write a review; and dealing with internal compliance regulations can make the process difficult.

This is where having some distance from the customer can be a big benefit. One of the key advantages of [external review sites](#) is that users can give feedback about your solutions without having to comply with company policy. This means that it is both easier to find users who are willing to share details of their experiences, and they will be more honest and open than if they were providing a corporate case study.



# What is the Best Way to Ask Users for Reviews?

---



To find people who are willing to provide a review of your product, start with making a list of users who have recently been in contact with your company. Users who completed an NPS survey, upgraded to a new version or purchased additional licenses are a good place to start.

Then, reach out to them with a short email, asking them to help others learn about the solution. People respond best to requests from people they know, so be sure to personalize the email and mention the name of their point of contact at your company. Stress to them that you want their real opinions -- the good and the bad -- and that if they prefer, the review can be published anonymously (more about that below). Provide the link to the review site where you would like them to publish the review.

To make it even easier for users to create reviews, you can set up a [Reviews as a Service \(RaaS\)](#) program. This enables users to provide reviews through a short phone interview with someone from the independent review site, instead of sitting down to write the reviews themselves. Be sure to tell them they will be able to edit and approve the review before it is published. Many people feel more comfortable speaking honestly to a third-party, rather than a representative of the company, so this is a great way to get honest reviews that will be valuable to anyone researching your product.

- **Make** a list of users who have recently been in contact with your company.
- **Reach** out with a short, personalized email.
- **Emphasize** that you want their real opinions and that they can remain anonymous if they prefer.
- **Provide** the link to the review site where you want them to publish a review.
- **Make** it easier for users to leave reviews by setting up a Reviews as a Service (RaaS) program.

# What if Customers Don't Want to Reveal They Are Using Your Solution?

---



Getting reviews can be challenging as some companies are hesitant to reveal which solutions they are using. They may see a competitive advantage in keeping that information to themselves or they may be concerned about security risks.. Anonymous reviews overcome that issue, but, if not done correctly, allowing anonymity can reduce credibility. To guarantee anonymous reviews are trustworthy, it is vital to [implement and communicate strict authentication measures](#), so everyone knows that behind “[reviewer1380810](#)” there is a real professional at a real company.

# Where to Find Users

## Via Customer Advocacy Programs



By tapping into your customer advocacy programs, you can connect with users who are not only experienced with your solution but also willing to share their feedback with others.



## Via Your Support Team

Customers who have had positive interactions with your support team are a great source of feedback, and user reviews. Once technical issues have been resolved they can provide reviews that discuss room for improvement, as well as your technical support.

## Identify Your Brand Evangelists Online



Monitor your brand online with tools like Google Alerts, SEMrush and Buzzsumo. Not only can it help you understand if your users are dissatisfied, but it can also help you identify users who love your solution and who you can potentially reach out to for user reviews.

## At Your Conferences and User Events



Once in-person meetups get going again, you can approach users at your conferences or events for reviews. This is a great way to target a large group of knowledgeable users who have valuable feedback to share. You can also record their feedback face-to-face, rather than rely on email or phone feedback, which can be more time consuming for your users. These tactics can even be adapted to online events. In 2020, several companies turned to IT Central Station to conduct review interviews during their virtual events, and this trend is continuing into 2021, and likely beyond.

## IT Central Station's Reviews as a Service (RaaS)



[Learn more »](#)



# What to Include in Your B2B User Questionnaires

---

## What Information Should Your User Reviews Include?

---

Once you've found users willing to give reviews, you need to know which questions potential buyers want answered.

Those kinds of questions may vary depending on your industry and technology. But customer service is consistently cited as a key factor in buying decisions, and so it should be included in all reviews. It's worth noting that Millennials highly value both customer service and user-generated content and [“their key role in the buying process makes them more likely to read and be influenced by reviews, as well as post them.”](#)

- Are readers most interested in your pricing model?
- Do they expect full disclosure of your technical support offering?
- Are scalability and stability the primary 'must-haves' on their checklist?



Here are a few more topics to cover in your questionnaires:

## Value

---

Ask users what they find valuable about your solution.

Their answers may surprise you and can provide invaluable information for your product team.

*Example:*

“[What do you find valuable in Microsoft Azure DevOps?](#)” Wilson Gonzalez, DevOps Manager, wrote:

“Everything that’s related to the pipeline has been very good. We’re using this to promote our code and to secure it. The library and all the stuff that we can manage inside the pipeline is helping us a lot.”

## Other solutions

---

Ask users which solutions they have also evaluated.

This information can give you great competitive information, and can also influence the potential buyers reading your user reviews.

*Example:*

When asked “[Did you consider any other solutions besides Apigee?](#)” a Director of System Architecture said:

“We had evaluated Software AG at the same time as Apigee... We chose Apigee because of its high availability and disaster recovery. Google Apigee uses ZooKeeper with an unstructured Cassandra database. This is different from Software AG, which uses a structured database like Oracle. Having to purchase Oracle licenses increases the cost.”

## Room for Improvement

---

Ask users how and where you can improve your solution.

Not only is this information very valuable for your product team, it also makes your reviews more believable. Users don’t trust five-star reviews that only say good things about a product.

*Example:*

When asked “[Where do you see room for improvement in Zabbix?](#)” Faustine Chisasa, an Engineering Supervisor, answered:

“Although Zabbix is great, the documentation is a bit lacking. The documentation gets a bit messy between versions and is not too detailed, which is a bit painful for first-timers, especially when they run into issues.”

Some users may be happy to give feedback, but can't because of their own corporate compliance policies. One way around this is to allow users to give reviews that either include their full details or are anonymous. By giving users this choice you will collect a wider range of user feedback and review materials.



**Now that you've got quality, authentic user reviews, how can you maximize this content to bring in the highest ROI to your company?**

# Six Departments in Your Company that Can Use Review Content to Increase Revenue

---

## 1. Your Product Team

---



A great product meets real needs. But how do you know what users need? Who can you ask? Peer reviews can do a lot of that legwork for you. They provide current, actionable feedback and insight into usage, ideas for new features, and more.

## 2. Your Marketing Team

---

Peer reviews provide a wealth of content that you can repurpose for marketing materials. Adding quotes from reviews to print or digital materials can provide valuable information without being “salesy”. Using the voice of your customers is the number one way to add credibility to your key messages. After all, it’s not your copywriter saying it, but a real, authenticated user.



## 3. Your SDR Team

---



In-depth user reviews can be a great tool for your SDR team. Traditionally SDR teams use top-of-the-funnel marketing materials to demonstrate why it’s worth getting on the phone. As we’ve noted, user reviews are more compelling than nearly all other forms of top-of-the-funnel content, including white papers and analyst reports. Customer Success Managers at IT Central Station frequently help SDR teams to identify peer review content to include in their emails, matching genuine users’ quotes to the specific sales messages.

## 4. Your Sales Team

---

Your sales team loves marketing materials that demonstrate the value of your solution for users, especially when it differentiates you from your competition. Yet when marketing materials don’t reflect the values potential users care about, your lead generation



efforts are in danger of producing a low number of B.A.N.T qualified leads. User reviews provide evidence of where your solutions stand out vis-à-vis your competitors, helping your sales team to make a compelling case and bring in more revenue.

IT Central Station can work with your team to help them integrate voice of customer marketing throughout the sales cycle. We also offer varied types of content assets targeted to different stages of the funnel. For example, in the awareness stage, PeerPaper reports combining expert analysis with peer content — like this one about securing remote work — can help position you as an opinion leader. Additionally, Peer reviews often include authentic comparisons of your product against competitors, which adds value when prospects are further along in the funnel.

## 5. Your Lead Generation Team



Your lead generation team wants to create gated content that resonates with your potential users. User reviews discussing both the pros and cons of your solution can be the key to bringing in more leads. While a white paper may generate interest, and a case study will be even more powerful, user-generated content brings the highest returns. Retargeting to user content consistently has a higher click-through rate than vendor-generated content, leading to more leads, and more engaged prospects.

Anyone reading a review of your product, or your competitor's, is a potential hot lead. IT Central Station helps you identify them by providing opt-in Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs) from community members who read relevant reviews or opt-in for relevant reports.

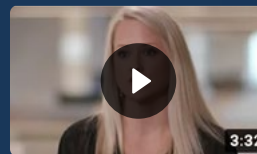
## 6. Your Customer Advocacy Team



Customer Advocacy teams gather user feedback for marketing and sales, but each case study can generate hundreds of work hours. Finding users willing to display their identities and be an evangelist for your company is certainly no easy task, and compliance, both internally and from your user's company, adds its own set of issues. Positive user reviews, gathered by an external source allows users to be more honest than in a case study, and questions aren't limited by internal protocols and regulations.

IT Central Station eliminates the footwork for your team, making every review downloadable as a case study PDF, and by identifying qualified "champions" for you when we conduct review interviews. This provides you with direct access to real users who have already agreed to be a reference, to speak to an analyst or do a formal case study.

“  
**We've earned 22 times sales pipeline from our overall investment in IT Central Station.**  
”



Lilly Roosken

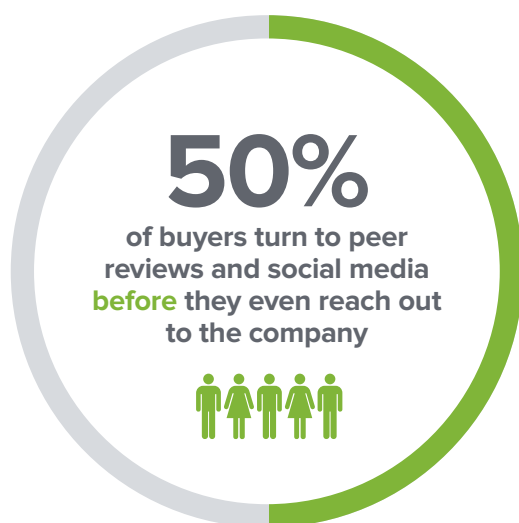
Lead Marketing Programs  
Manager at BMC

[Click to watch »](#)

# How to Leverage Negative User Reviews to Increase ROI

Just like consumers, technology software shoppers value the insight they can gain from product reviews. That is the key reason peer-based product reviews are so essential to a company's success. What many marketing managers don't realize is:

It's not that only positive reviews that bring traffic; negative reviews can also boost your ROI. Any reviews can contribute to a boost in search ranking results as well as drive increased traffic to your website.



Even negative feedback, when worded the right way, can lead to increased conversion rates. Of course, this doesn't mean that you should start scrambling for angry customers and poor reviews. As you can imagine – it's not as simple as that!

## So, how can you leverage negative user reviews into ROI?

Here are three lessons for enterprise-level technology marketers to leverage negative reviews not only for boosting their customer feedback, but also for increasing conversions.

# LESSON #1

## Learn from the Experts - Your Users

While nobody enjoys criticism, intelligent companies view criticism at face value: an honest and authentic appraisal of how their product is performing. Negative reviews give your product team invaluable insight into what you are doing right and into what you're doing wrong — from the most influential and pertinent source of all: your users.

Businesses in today's tech industry need to utilize agile marketing techniques for constant improvement of their products. In the technology sector, if you aren't advancing, you are undergoing a speedy demise of outdatedness.

Because negative reviews are generated specifically by your niche audience, these reviews not only help your company by highlighting the areas that need improvement, but they provide the most relevant and useful form of feedback.

### Utilizing these insights will help you to:

- Tailor your product to the changing demands of the public
- Hone in on the shortcomings
- Craft an applicable plan for improvement.

“ If a customer is willing to invest their valuable oxygen and time and provide actionable feedback, I'm gonna listen every day of the week. ”



Rick Bosworth  
Director of Marketing, SentinelOne

# LESSON #2

## Seize the Opportunity for Communication

Any comment made by a customer, even if it's negative, opens a line of communication between you and your audience. This is a golden opportunity for you to score positive PR points, as well as customer insight.

By responding directly to negative feedback, you show customers that your company is listening to their concerns. Contrarily, ignoring feedback of any sort can portray your business as one that doesn't value its customers. IT Central Station offers vendors the opportunity to respond directly to reviewers via the platform, showing the original reviewer and anyone who reads the review that they are attentive to users' concerns.

This is vital, as market research has shown that customers who were responded to 'correctly' after a negative experience were much more likely to recommend that business to friends later on.

### 'Correct' Responses to Negative Feedback include:

- Validating the complaint
- Asking questions for clarification
- Apologizing (but without giving excuses or being defensive)
- Offering solutions
- (Always) thanking the customer for their time
- An interaction that follows the above guidelines will generate positive feelings on the part of the customer as well as create a great image for potential customers in the future.

With [50% of buyers turning to peer reviews and social media](#) before they even reach out to the company, answering negative comments in these public forums is vital.

# LESSON #3

## Foster Authenticity

---

When looking to authenticate a brand, consumers look out for the negative comments that supplement the positive ones. When a potential buyer sees a company that boasts hundreds of positive reviews without a single negative comment, they automatically assume the feedback is fictitious. Why? Because no one product offering is flawless, and negative feedback indicates that companies are sincere in their efforts to honor their users' perspective and improve their product offering.

Seeing negative feedback on a website gives customers the impression that your company is an honest one. After all, you have the ability to reject or delete negative comments. By leaving up these less-than-flattering reviews, you show your potential buyers that you are prepared to deal honestly, even if there is a little discomfort on your part in doing so.

“

Customers want to know the real use cases that customers can solve with the technology. With IT Central Station it's not just a vendor telling their story, it's real practical experiences of their peers, what's working, what's not, so they can make an informed decision.

”



Nitin Agale  
CMO,  
Securonix

# CONCLUSION

---

In this e-book, we have delved into the different ways user-generated content can increase your company's growth, particularly in the current uncertain business climate, with the effects of COVID-19 continuing to be felt. We've identified why and how peer reviews offer the authentic user voice in an ever-crowded enterprise technology space, and showed you how different teams can leverage this content to increase performance.

Instead of sitting by passively when your users seek out alternatives, B2B Enterprise marketers have a unique opportunity to harness this content to influence your users in their buying journey.



# ABOUT IT CENTRAL STATION

## Reviews powering a new enterprise tech marketplace

---

IT Central Station is where enterprise tech decision makers go to read peer product reviews in Devops, Cybersecurity and IT. Every reviewer on IT Central Station is verified to help buyers make well-informed, smart business decisions.

For tech marketers, we turn your customers into marketers by capturing in-depth user reviews and unparalleled peer-driven content. IT Central Station fills your pipeline with high-intent, low-funnel leads, driven by decision makers in active buying cycles. IT Central Station is about infusing the voice of your customer throughout your marketing and sales.

For more information, contact [vendors@itcentralstation.com](mailto:vendors@itcentralstation.com)

[www.itcentralstation.com](http://www.itcentralstation.com)