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BUILDING CUSTOMER TRUST THROUGH ONLINE BUSINESS REVIEWS

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INTRODUCTION

The e-commerce environment has undergone significant changes, offering convenience and availability of various products and services. Nevertheless, this era of digital transformation has presented distinctive obstacles, particularly regarding credibility and trust. Trust is formed when one party in a transaction believes in the reliability and honesty of the other (Sondern & Hertel, 2024). Unlike brick-and-mortar stores, where customers have face-to-face interactions with salespeople and can touch products, online shoppers rely solely on digital representations and information provided by the retailer as they navigate a virtual environment. Belardinelli and Gili (2022) state that credibility and trust play a vital role as "relational goods," with significant positive effects on the well-being of individuals and society. Creating satisfying customer experiences and promoting long-term success in e-commerce customer service relies on establishing credibility and trust as the foundation in this context. It is nurtured through enjoyable interactions, transparent communication, and a steadfast dedication to fulfilling commitments. Creating a feeling of safety and reliability, a trustworthy service is an essential component of the customer experience.

Without face-to-face contact, the endorsement of happy customers is crucial for establishing trust. Customer reviews, testimonials, and influencer endorsements serve as a type of digital word-of-mouth marketing that provides reassurance to potential customers regarding the quality and trustworthiness of products and services. Displaying authentic reviews on product pages, presenting case studies, and including customer testimonials on the website offer social evidence of the brand's trustworthiness. Actively responding to customer feedback, whether it is positive or negative, shows a dedication to constant improvement and builds trust and credibility. Over the last twenty years, relationship marketing has gained more significance, making trust a key factor across various industries. Hence, the lack of emphasis on the role of trust in managing challenging emergency situations is highlighted, despite its acknowledged importance in purchasing processes (Latino et al., 2023). Therefore, this article delves deeper into establishing trust with customers through online business reviews.

CUSTOMER TRUST AND ONLINE BUSINESS REVIEWS

Trust is the base for successful relationships between brands and consumers. Consumers rely on information to navigate the complex world of commerce, looking for advice to help them make choices that align with their desires and preferences. In this scenario, reviews act as a beacon, constructing a narrative from actual experiences. Authentic assessments act as guards, truth guardians, and visibility foundations in the realm of genuineness. They are not just testimonials but represent the vast array of consumer interactions with a company. Serving as a contemporary version of oral recommendations, these evaluations provide important information on the dependability, excellence, and general contentment of a product or service (Al-Adwan et al., 2020). Positive feedback from customers online is crucial in establishing trust and confidence in a brand's products. They confirm the brand's trustworthiness and serve as convincing recommendations for potential customers, which significantly influence sales and customer acquisition rates (Tran et al., 2022).

Satisfied customers' positive feedback boosts the brand's reputation, attracting consumers making choices in the market. This encouragement helps potential buyers feel confident and motivated to make well-informed buying choices. Based on research by Habib et al. (2021), when satisfied customers share their positive experiences about a brand, it significantly enhances how its reputation is viewed by individuals evaluating various choices. When contented customers express their positive experiences through electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), it acts as a spotlight drawing others to trust and believe in that brand. This affirmative buzz not only validates the brand's trustworthiness but also steers other prospective clients toward wise decisions. It is like a chain reaction: increased satisfied customers, increased confidence, and increased attraction towards that brand over its competitors in the market.

Credibility in this partnership is further reinforced with an additional layer of strength. Trustworthiness of a service or product brand is established through demonstrated expertise, reliability, and a proven history of success. Clients have confidence in the professionalism and expertise of a business when they possess credibility. Credibility functions as a symbol of quality assurance, establishing trust with customers and setting up a service apart from rivals, whether it be a bank, a healthcare facility, or an online platform. Research shows that the credibility of messages and media is important for building trust in digital influencers, thereby influencing impulsive buying on social networking sites (Shamim et al., 2022). There are several advantages to having trust and credibility in the service industry. To begin with, these traits significantly reduce the level of perceived risk. Customers often hesitate to engage with new services due to worries about the quality of service. The resulting contentment will foster consumer confidence in the business. Trust is established when one party in the exchange process has faith in the trustworthiness and honesty of the other party (Aras et al., 2023). Positive feedback, honest communication, and a proven history help reduce risks and encourage consumers to make initial purchases.

Moreover, consumer feedback enhances the level of connection and communication between the service provider and the customer, promoting transparency and genuineness in the partnership. Businesses can demonstrate their appreciation for their customers' opinions and trust by being open to feedback and transparent about their practices (Rane et al., 2023). By seeking out and acting upon customer feedback, service providers show their dedication to understanding client needs, addressing issues, and constantly working to enhance the quality of their services. This open communication fosters trust and encourages a feeling of partnership

and mutual respect between the service provider and its customers, establishing the groundwork for enduring relationships based on trust, loyalty, and mutual contentment.

In addition, trust and credibility serve as boosters for growth and innovation. A business that provides services and has won its customers' trust is more likely to obtain constructive comments. The willingness to listen to input, along with a credible reputation, promotes an environment of continual improvement and adaptation to changing demands from customers. A business that values feedback and is dedicated to adjusting according to customer insights fosters a setting conducive to supporting both growth and innovation. Businesses can develop more solid connections, remain important in dynamic markets, and gain a competitive advantage by cultivating trust (Urefe et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

In short, building trust and credibility gives a competitive advantage to businesses in today's digital era, with abundant information and endless options. Having online reviews and testimonials, along with a clear commitment to honest business practices, can help in building a solid online business reputation. Companies that participate in reviews by replying to feedback and expressing gratitude for customer input enhance this trust even more. This commitment shows a company's involvement in constant improvement and satisfying customers, ultimately boosting its reputation and cultivating a loyal customer following.

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