



How to gain consumer trust (and sell more products)

Introduction

All brands and retailers want to sell more, but if the end goal is to simply sell any product to anyone, then the result is a lot of dissatisfaction and returns. Here at ExpertVoice, we believe that there are voices out there who influence the purchasing decisions consumers make (and we call them experts). We decided to test a theory: do consumers trust paid ad efforts? And if not, who do they trust?

We surveyed more than 500 consumers — weighted U.S. Census Audience — on their buying behavior as it relates to recommendations. All quoted data and findings are attributed to this study, unless noted otherwise.



By Jennifer Robinson

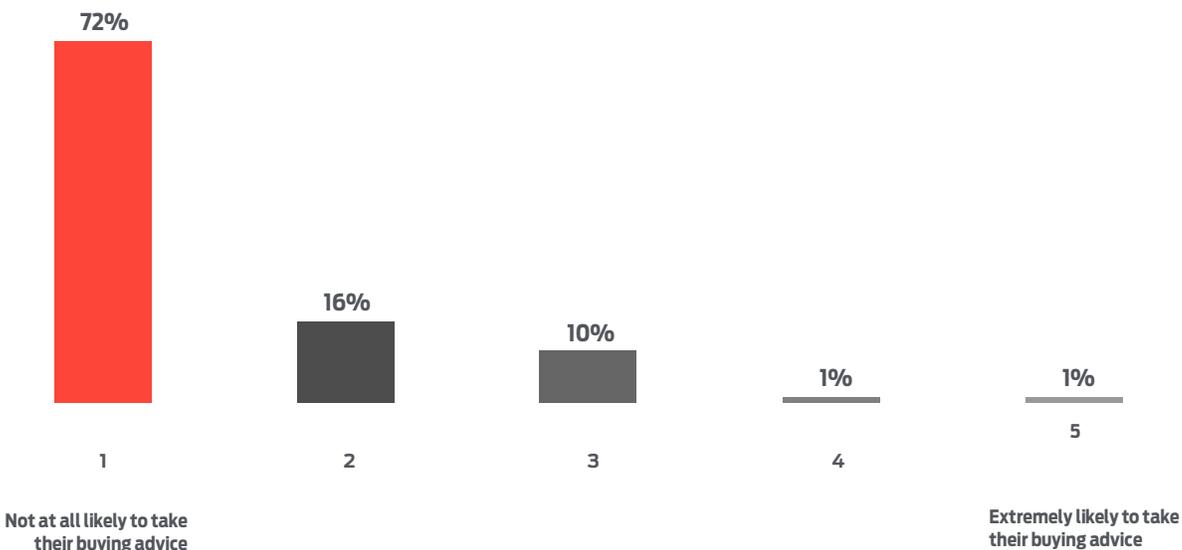
Jen Robinson is the Content Strategist at ExpertVoice. She's been telling stories since she was a little girl, except instead of forcing her family to sit on the couch while she performed, she now just publishes them on the internet. Jen enjoys traveling the world, cooking with her husband, and getting as much sleep as one can with a young infant.

Consumers don't trust marketing

Only 4% of Americans [believe marketing and advertising is done by people with integrity](#). Let's flip that around: 96% of Americans believe that marketing and advertising professionals create content that is done to intentionally mislead them in the buying process. This perception — while surely not the intention of marketers — presents a tricky problem for today's general consumer. While they need guidance and assistance in navigating the choices available to them, they don't want to feel like they're being sold to, and they certainly don't want it to come from a voice they deem inauthentic. They need to trust the source of the recommendation they're receiving. And brands and retailers have an equally tricky problem — they still need to communicate who they are and what they have to offer consumers.

The celebrity endorsement first helped bridge this conundrum, as the right spokesperson for your brand can theoretically provide recommendations at scale. Endorsements act as a great way to spread brand awareness, but as a recent consumer panel reveals, 72% of respondents state that if someone providing a recommendation doesn't have direct knowledge and experience regarding a product, the consumer is not at all likely to take their advice.

How likely are you to take buying advice from someone who is likely not knowledgeable in the product field?



The history of the celebrity endorsement

The concept of finding someone to vouch for your product and brand is an old one. Really old, in fact. One of the earliest examples of an endorsement comes from Wedgwood — a chinaware and pottery manufacturer — and the British Queen consort. She liked their product so much, she allowed them to call it ‘Queen’s Ware,’ and it sold tremendously well as a result. After all, who would know more about a fine, delicate dish than a member of royalty?

The 1900s saw the rise of athlete endorsements, particularly as baseball and its players became synonymous with the American way. And as Big Tobacco proved beginning in the mid-century, movie stars can be powerful marketing tools. Then came the era of the true sports stars: Nike and Michael Jordan were a match made in marketing heaven, and the Air Jordan remains the best-selling basketball shoe of all time. Every basketball-loving boy born in the ‘80s wanted to be like Mike — and wear his shoes.

As the years passed, marketers have continued to capitalize on famous figures, usually an entertainment celebrity or a professional athlete. However, there has been a failure to account for the technological advances that have shifted how consumers are both marketed to and perceive those marketing efforts.

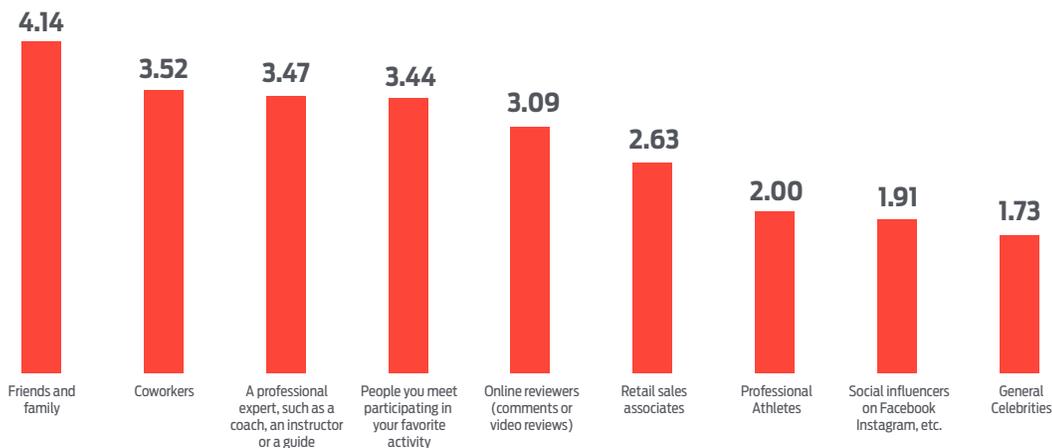
The internet has completely transformed how we view and engage with content, and now that consumers can pay to opt out of any and all advertising through web browsing and visual media, brands need to pivot. Where John Wayne endorsing Camel or Cindy Crawford endorsing Pepsi might have once resulted in a purchase, consumers now only look at the endorsements as awareness. Traditional ads are critical to the buyer’s journey, and bringing your brand and products into their line of sight when weighing their options. But when a consumer stares down a purchase — especially a considered, or more expensive, one — they aren’t taking a celebrity’s word for it.

Why celebrity endorsements don't work

This consumer panel revealed that when it comes to buying something, people want help. When contemplating the endless row of cameras and lenses, the choices become overwhelming. DSLR or mirrorless cameras, prime or zoom lenses, and all at seemingly random price points from at least half a dozen different brands — what really sets them apart? Considered purchases require research and price comparisons to ensure you're getting the right product for your needs. Does a celebrity or athlete endorsement really help you differentiate which product or brand is the best one for you?

The panel's answer to that question is a resounding no. Only 3% of respondents trust general celebrities.

How likely are you to trust a product recommendation from each of the following groups?



The trust factor only marginally improves when considering a professional athlete's recommendation — just 7% see them as a trustworthy source.

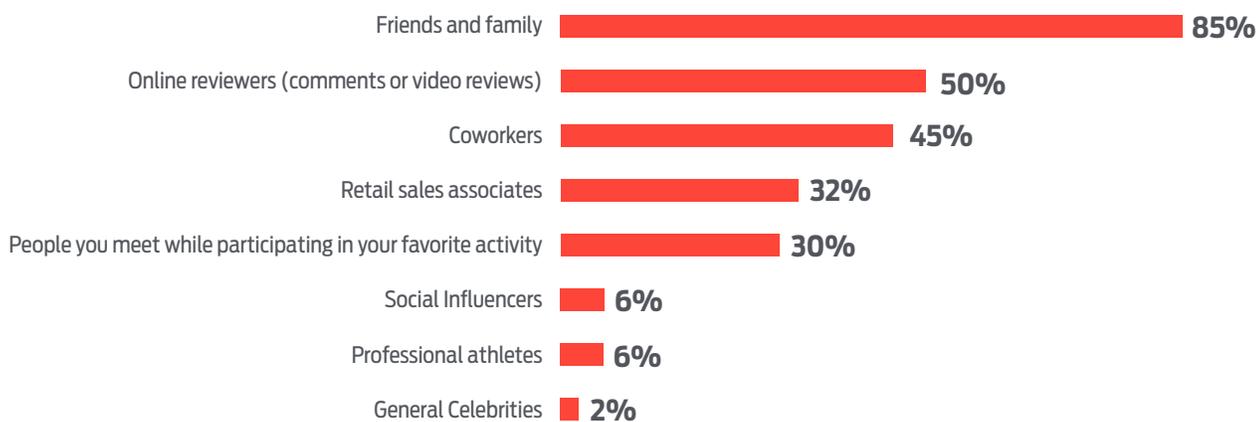
What is it about a celebrity or an influencer that makes it difficult to trust them? According to 43% of respondents, their greatest concern is that these people are paid by the brands they're promoting. Additionally, in the free response section of the survey, many consumers express concern over what knowledge a celebrity actually possesses regarding the product they are being paid to endorse. They state that having honest, personable, and educated individuals making recommendations based on actual experience with the product is the difference maker in determining whether or not they would trust a recommendation.

The survey also considered influencer marketing, and found that while consumers trust social influencers more than celebrity endorsements, it isn't by much. 72% are unlikely to trust product recommendations from an influencer.

Where consumers go for recommendations

So who do people trust for product recommendations? According to survey results, people in the hunt for a product go to people they know — friends, family, coworkers — who carry expertise. While 83% of respondents state they don't put a lot of weight behind a celebrity endorsement, that same percentage of respondents — 83% — instead trust the product recommendations given by friends and family. When asked which groups they took buying advice from, respondents overwhelmingly stated that friends and family were the top choice.

Which of the following groups have you taken buying advice from in the previous year?



Retail associates remained fairly neutral in this weighted scale; about 42% of respondents didn't feel strongly toward the value they offered in providing a valuable recommendation. But as this study shows, the right retail associates can be powerful sources of recommendations. Brands and retailers can improve this metric by investing in their associates: improving their product and brand knowledge base, and empowering them to be relationship sellers.

An important distinction to note is the consumers surveyed were asked specifically about what led them to an actual purchase. Brands invest significant dollars in the awareness phase to ensure they are top of mind for the consumer in the market for a product, but when it comes to actually purchasing that product, consumers want to hear a recommendation from someone they believe to be authentic, and unfortunately, celebrity endorsements don't carry that weight of authenticity. Brands need to shift resources into the part of the buyer's journey where a purchase is imminent. Engaging and elevating recommendations from the experts who already communicate about these brands is a key piece to impacting the buyer at the most critical part: the point of sale.

Expertise is crucial to consumers looking for advice on what to buy. If you're in the market for a new tennis racket or shoes, a personal recommendation from someone like Roger Federer makes sense. Maybe you could even believe his watch recommendation, as he is, after all, at least Swiss. But his latest endorsement deal — Barilla pasta — doesn't seem very meaningful, as he has self-proclaimed to know nothing about cooking, much less why Barilla pasta is the best pasta for you to cook with.

In today's world of innumerable buying choices, consumers need voices they believe to be authentic and grounded in expertise, voices motivated not simply by financial gain, but by the desire to help.

Awareness is important, but as consumers move down the marketing funnel toward deciding on — and making — a purchase, they're going to look to the people around them for recommendations, not the people in an ad. They're going to look to the people they trust.

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