

Harnessing the Voice of the Consumer

The effects of consumer generated media (CGM) on purchase intent

By Ted Rubin and John Andrews

Consumer generated media (CGM) is quickly becoming a very effective tool for brands to connect with customers. This form of media has actually been growing in importance for some time. Nielsen's Pete Blackshaw points out in the 2006 [Consumer-Generated Media 101](#), CGM media may be "stimulated by marketers but is owned by consumers and carries a higher level of trust than traditional media." With most brands now engaging some form of social media engagement, the question becomes can CGM influence purchase intent and how effective is it at producing sales conversion compared to other types of media.

The importance of search to sales conversion

Perhaps the single biggest change in consumer behavior is the heavy reliance on search for gathering information about categories and brands that interest them. While relevant causal data in this field is still being developed, this [2009 report by Zaaz](#) showed a direct correlation between search activity and consumer conversion rates in various retail channels.

Blogs and other forms of CGM have enormous impact on search results due to a combination of key term usage, links to other sites and sharing of content across multiple social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In fact, the blogging community is becoming very savvy about using multiple social media streams to drive enhanced search results. For instance, a typical blog post now features a video hosted on You Tube, a location check in on Foursquare and even an image post from Instagram.

All of these connections serve not only to enhance search results but also to connect to a much larger audience than just a single post would achieve alone. Each additional connection point expands the reach of the original post making it a hub of connection for related content.

Building a conversational platform

There are three important considerations when adding CGM to an integrated media plan: trust, scalability and the impact

Case Study

Walmart Elevenmoms: The Secret to Great Hair

A good example of organic search optimization is the 2008 Pantene brand re-fresh at Walmart. Along with traditional media, P&G used the Walmart Elevenmom group to build social content associated with the launch.

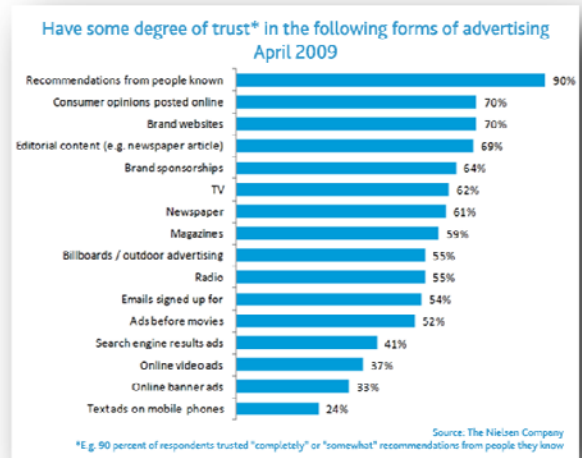
Elevenmom bloggers created [blog posts and videos](#) shared on Twitter and Facebook helping to build search rankings for key terms. The result is long lasting with CGM still affecting the [first page of a Google search](#).

of smartphone connectivity.

Trust

Many studies are starting to show evidence of the change in consumer's trust of various forms of media. Traditional media and new media advertising such as mobile ads and search engine advertising score lower marks while personal and network recommendations and brand websites perform fairly well.

CGM content can help to augment other forms of brand media by blending together online and offline media and connecting it with retail channel digital and social streams.



Scalability

Many marketers wonder how CGM can be effectively and efficiently scaled to create the reach and frequency of traditional media. Some of the answer lies in the aggregation of content from similar types of producers. As social media producers carefully cultivate their audiences, their blogs and other connected media are rivaling and in some cases surpassing traditional media vehicles. Additionally, their audiences become an additional source of reach by sharing content through their social networks as well.

Smartphone Connectivity

74% of consumers make a purchase based on a smartphone search

Finally, there is perhaps no stronger shopper conversion tool than the smartphone. Consumers are just beginning to understand the potential for their phones to make shopping easier, more fun and much more personal. Seventy percent of

Case Study - MurphyUSA: CGM effects on purchase intent and loyalty

MurphyUSA has been actively engaging a brand advocate community for over a year. Community members are involved in all aspects of marketing from providing feedback on campaigns to vetting digital platforms like MurphyUSA's iPhone app, Facebook and Twitter presence and text messaging programs.

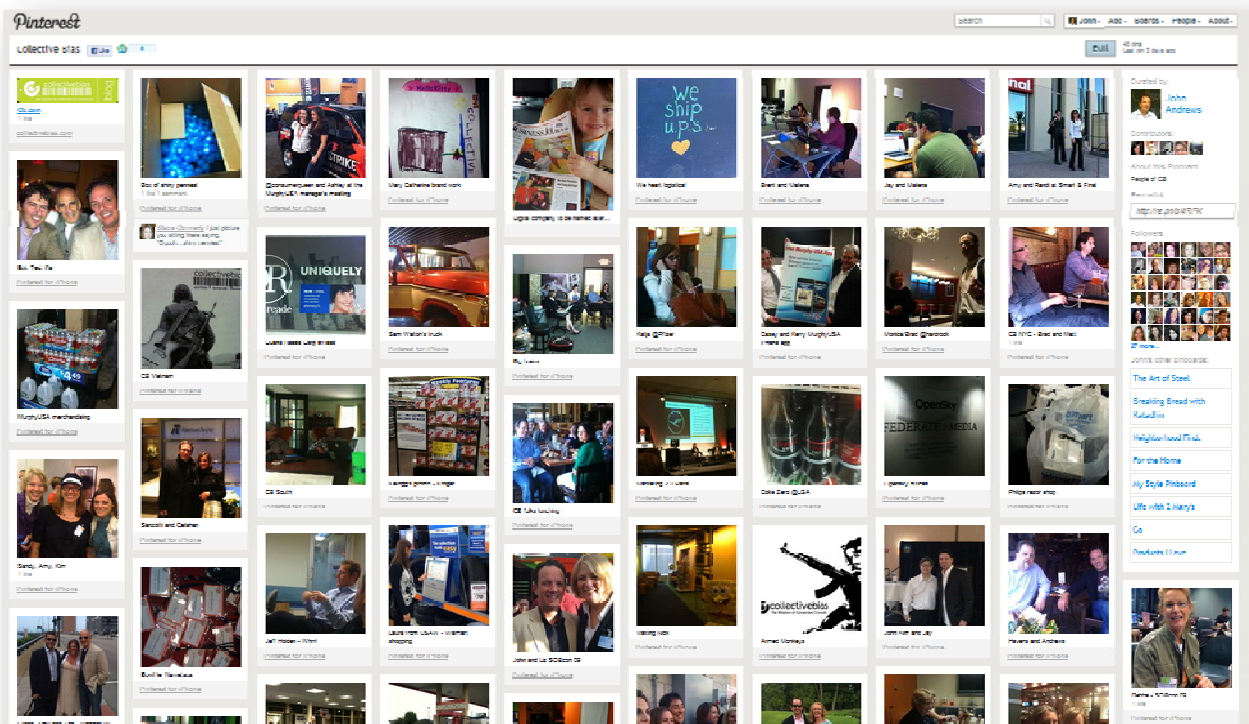
The community has become an important catalyst for building awareness and usage of emerging media tools among MurphyUSA's customer base. Customers connecting to Murphy USA digitally are 3X [more likely to shop MurphyUSA locations](#) once a week .

Smartphone owners are using the devices inside a store to compare prices, look for deals and connect to ratings and reviews according to this [2011 study by Google](#). CGM content becomes an invaluable connector to Smartphone users through the social networks they are using before, during and after shopping trips.

Impact on Purchase Intent

In addition to driving loyalty for MurphyUSA, CGM also drove significant new trial and brand preference. Several recent studies have shown that social media currently has little impact on purchase intent – with which we tend to agree. The real power of the medium is its ability to affect search, connect social content to brand and retail content and create an entire ecosystem of information.

As social and mobile command an ever increasing share of consumer time spent with media, marketers must consider how to engage consumers in a way this is radically different from the interruption messaging of the past few decades. Consumers can and will gladly avoid uninvited and obtuse brand outreach. Smart managers can now build true engagement with their customers and include them in the branding process. Those that do will be rewarded.



Final thoughts: media integration (What's your Pinterest plan?)

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of CGM is the constant and rapid rate of change. It seems each day, there is a new media platform and mobile interaction becomes a more ingrained behavior. Building a CGM platform group as the core of a social strategy enables a

brand to add the voice of the consumer into all aspects of brand management and connect online and offline media seamlessly across retail and digital channels.

About John Andrews

[John Andrews](#), Collective Bias Founder/CEO, has over 14 years experience with leading brands like Sara Lee, Eastman Kodak Digital, Newell Rubbermaid, and of course Walmart, where he is perhaps best known for the creation of its award winning social media platform Elevenmoms, an industry-leading online customer advocate program.

About Ted Rubin

[Ted Rubin](#), Collective Bias Board of Advisors, has a deep online background beginning in 1997 with Seth Godin, as [CMO of e.l.f. Cosmetics](#), & recently as [Chief Social Marketing Officer, OpenSky](#). Rubin became known for his active use of social media to build relationships and brand advocacy. During his time at e.l.f. he coined the term Return on Relationship (ROR) and doubled its customer base while increasing sales with a limited budget.

About Collective Bias

Collective Bias, LLC, facilitates the creation of real shopper media by connecting groups of social media influencers to the brands and retailers they use in their daily lives. Our Social Fabric® community drives conversations on a wide variety of social media platforms in order to build consumer engagement and brand loyalty that ultimately lead to sales conversion.