

# EARNED CONTENT

Transforming ecommerce and retail marketing

**Olapic**



# Olapic

## Introduction



The proliferation of channels through which retailers and brands can connect to their customers has fundamentally changed both how retailers retail and how shoppers shop.

One of the most significant changes in consumer behaviour has been to shift away from being sold to towards being engaged with. Driven by the combined rise of mobile technology and social media, consumers want to be informed and entertained and they, more often than not, also want to align themselves with brands and organisations that they feel represent their values.

As a result, retailers find that they need to be more in tune with these shoppers and offer a much more content-led approach to engaging with them.

This has turned many retailers on to 'earned content' – user generated and shared content that puts the brand in the hands of the consumer and fundamentally shifts how retailers and their consumers interact.

Social media channels have long been awash with such user created content. Instagram alone has more than 500 million users and sees almost 100 million photos and videos posted daily. Harnessing this content by brand and letting the consumers themselves market and endorse products kills both birds with the one social stone: it engages consumers on a more profound level – letting them become part of the brand story – while also giving retailers and brands access to the vast amount of content that they need to keep all their digital channels buzzing in the era of the impulsive, rarely-sated shopper.

But how do you do it? In this white paper, we shall take a look at the options and opportunities for retail brands to create and deploy an earned content strategy, as well as outlining how to curate such content, analyse the results and keep refining the process as consumer taste and habits change.

Underlined by some bespoke industry research, this report will also look at where UK retailers are at with earned content, where they see it fitting into their everyday processes and what the likely trends are for the future.

While the earned content is seemingly a concept and strategy that is understood by retailers, it is a long way from being implemented effectively in all but a few leading brands. However, amongst those enlightened brands, we shall take a closer look at what has been done with earned content to showcase how affective it can be and draw out some of the key steps to developing and maintaining a world-class earned content strategy.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# Sponsor's Introduction

**T**

he customer journey is more complex than ever before. As a result of mobile proliferation and the rise of social channels such as Instagram and Facebook, modern consumers are engaging with brands, and one another, in new and profound ways. While consumers are inundated with messaging at all times, and across all touchpoints, many marketers struggle to create experiences that will stand out from the noise, differentiate from increasingly sophisticated competition, and build trust with audiences that have grown sceptical of traditional advertising methodology.

Put differently, consumers are demanding personalised experiences that speak to their unique lifestyles and value sets. To find product inspiration and purchase validation they can trust, they are turning to their peers' content being shared on social channels.

In fact, according to Olapic's Consumer Trust Survey, respondents trust images of other consumers on social media seven times more than traditional advertising\*. Intelligent marketers, especially in the retail sector, have recognised this user-generated, or "earned" content as an opportunity to co-create better brand experiences for their audiences, and are curating, activating, and analysing it across all touchpoints including display, paid media, organic social, email, offline, and in-store.

Today, earned content is a critical component to an effective retail marketing strategy. In order to better understand how retailers view consumers' content, and how they are utilising it within the marketing mix, Olapic commissioned this report with Internet Retailing.

As you review the full findings, there are a few insights I feel compelled to highlight:

While most retailers understand the value of earned content, most are still not activating it to its full potential. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed reported at least some understanding (34% understand it well, 28% understand it "somewhat") of the value of earned content. Still, 58% noted that they are just sharing the content on social channels, leaving an enormous opportunity on the table to amplify all of their owned channels and improve not just engagement, but conversion, accordingly.

A majority of brands see "marketing" as the clear owner of earned content. For the brands we work with, marketing is a primary stakeholder in the activation of earned content. However, e-commerce, paid media, and even in-store teams can also realise immense value from an earned content strategy. In this research, just 14% noted user content to be a "cross-company responsibility."

User-generated content is on the rise for a vast majority of retailers. The amount of content being generated and shared on social spaces on behalf of brands is on the rise. In this survey, 67% of respondents noted an increase in photos and videos being tagged to their brands. If brands are not yet deploying an intelligent strategy to take advantage of this content, they are missing out on a powerful opportunity.

Brands that wish to succeed now and into the future require a new approach, one which involves co-creation and shared ownership over the brand identity. It is clear from this report that we are at a critical moment in the maturity of earned content, and while some brands are already excelling, many still require education to maximise their potential. After working with many of the world's leading retailers, we have seen the overwhelming impact that user-generated content can have on increasing engagement, driving conversions, and building long-term customer loyalty. We hope you find this report useful, and that earned content can help you build better relationships with your audiences.



## AUTHOR

*Jose de Cabo, Co-founder at Olapic*

\* "Consumer Trust: Usage & Attitudes Towards User-Generated Visual Content." Olapic. 2016. This research was commissioned across 6 markets in the U.S. and Europe and was carried out by market research specialist Censuswide.



# Commercial Context of Earned Content

**S**ocial media is one of the defining socio-technical developments of the early 21st Century. Presidents use Twitter to disseminate policy, the media increasingly relies on social media to understand what goes on behind the curtain in politics and business, families use Facebook to stay in touch across the world and shoppers use it to define themselves and the brands they like.

And people love to share. A 2016 study of 600 UK shoppers aged 16 and over by Olapic found that the vast majority share everything from status updates to third party visual content across social media, provoking feelings of engagement, happiness and acceptance among many consumers.

Around half of respondents share status updates (54%) and photos (49%) at least once a week. Millennials, in particular, are avid sharers of their own photos, with more than half (51%) doing so at least weekly.

British respondents also demonstrated a preference for sharing third-party visual content, such as that created by brands, media and influencers: 33% report sharing such content once a week or more and 56% do so at least once a month.

However, this fondness for third-party content is also evident among older generations. Though individuals above the age of 29 post personal content less than their younger counterparts, individuals between ages 30 and 44 share third-party content almost as much as those under 30.

According to the Olapic research, 45% of consumers look at user generated content (UGC) for inspiration at least once a day and 40% share hashtagged branded content to show off what they have bought. Perhaps more powerfully, 76% of shoppers surveyed trust this UGC – seeing it as more honest and informative than advertising. And 56% are more likely to buy a product after seeing it featured positively in a relatable UGC image or posting.

In fact, a quarter of people surveyed have purchased something because they saw it in a UGC posting.

This across the board enjoyment of posting third-party visual content presents a huge opportunity to brands: letting them in to becoming a privileged part of their customer's online identities.

On the flipside, these brands will also benefit from positive and influential endorsements from these very same consumers. And the brands and retailers can also use this content to develop better customer experience, build greater loyalty and use what consumers are saying to understand how their products are used out in the real world. The value of such content works across the whole business.

However, to truly leverage this they can't just sit by and wait for content to appear, they have to earn it – hence why we refer to it as earned content.

## EARNING THE CONTENT

What are the main activities open to retailers and brands to generate UGC and create an earned content strategy? Firstly, brands seeking this level of engagement with consumers need to build a conversational rapport and a proper relationship with their customers before they can do anything else.

Consumers get a buzz from sharing – with 57% feeling engaged with their friends, a third feeling happy and 32% feeling accepted when people interact with their posts. They like to let people know what they are thinking and doing and like to be reinforced. This also has an influence over other people (even though only 6% claim to be setting out to influence others with posts) – another powerful reason for adopting earned content as a brand.



“ 45% of consumers look at user generated content (UGC) for inspiration at least once a day and 40% share hashtag-ed branded content to show off what they have bought ”

But to tap into this intensely personal world, brands need to tread carefully. As we shall come to see, understanding where a consumer is at in the purchasing journey – and why they are sharing something – is key to working out how to engage them.

The main way that consumers are going to be producing and sharing content is via social media on a mobile device. According to Matt Lawson from Google Think\*, 87% of people have their smartphone at their side day and night, 68% check their phone within 15 mins of waking up and users, on average, look at their phone 150 times – totalling nearly three solid hours – each day. The smartphone is ever-present in peoples’ lives, capturing moments.

Much of this content is visual, with 52% of people seeing photos as the most appealing form of UGC, with video second on 27% and words a lowly 12%. It comes as no surprise, the human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than words.

Consumers also like to use brand hashtags in some posts. 74% of global shoppers have uploaded a photo and hashtagged the brand, with 49% of them wanting to share their purchases and 34% wanting to say they enjoyed a brand’s product or service.

Entering a contest, however, emerged as a less popular motive garnering just 14%, which suggests the challenges brands face when encouraging hashtag adoption and the importance of making hashtags relevant and memorable.

For those that get it right, branded hashtags can increase visibility and engagement as Lancôme’s #bareselfie campaign demonstrates. The brand encouraged women to post pictures of themselves without makeup, generating 50% of the sales and driving a conversion rate increase of 4% for its newly-launched DreamTone serum\*\*.

Yet, many brands have struggled to adapt to this changing behaviour, continuing to cast out broad marketing messaging, and doing so in the more popular, high-traffic moments of the consumer lifecycle, rather than trying to understand what consumers are doing, where they are doing it and what mood they are in when they post – all things that can be garnered from their posts and hashtag.

Certainly, there are moments that inherently stand out. As a basic example, when a consumer purchases a new home, he or she may be most interested in offers for new furniture. But more often, as a result of mobile disruption, the consumer journey has been fractured into hundreds of smaller decision-making moments across all stages, including post-purchase.

Understanding these moments and leveraging them, as we shall see in subsequent chapters of this report, is how a brand can start to earn the content put out there by its customers.

### WHAT IS THE ROI?

While it is plain to see that there exists a strong commercial environment in which to collect and use earned content, is there a strong commercial argument for using it: does it yield measurable results?

In later chapters we shall see how to measure and analyse the impact of your earned content strategy, the actual ROI of adopting earned content is easy to see. Engaging with consumers in the channels of their choice and using their content can produce huge returns.

If nothing else, social media channels are where your customers are hanging out online and where they are engaging with their friends, family and brands. Getting your message to them here is going to have some impact.

Alongside that, however, lies the ability to tap into their networks and be part of their conversations and postings. Done right, this can help consumers endorse who they are and take cache from the brands they identify with.

For the brand, these people act as free advocates who can suggest your products and services to their peers, who in turn you can also engage and turn into more advocates.

According to an Olapic study, globally 23% of shoppers seek purchase inspiration from UGC, with the proportion rising to 25% among millennials. In the US, 70% of shoppers say they are more likely to purchase something if they see positive and relatable UGC featuring with it online.

\* Lawson, Matt. “Win Every Micro- Moment With a Better Mobile Strategy.” Google Think. September, 2015].

\*\* Lancôme #bareselfie campaign, see <http://www.olapic.com/successful-brands-dominate-instagram-can/>,



However, the impact of adopting an earned content strategy can go much further than that, offering the business a whole new level of insight into how consumers find and purchase products and how they use products. Together this can give valuable insight into not only how your branding and marketing are working, but can get to the very heart of what makes your product appeal and, perhaps most importantly, can allow agile brands to adapt and improve products based on how their key user base is using them.

With this in mind, investing in technology to help identify content and curate UGC and how it is used can streamline the whole process, as well as producing extremely detailed metrics on what works and why so that you can not only manage the process effectively but constantly adapt and refine, test and re-position on the fly.

Such systems cost money, but through streamlining and identification of success, can pay for themselves rapidly and repeatedly through increased sales that will be brought about directly and indirectly through an earned content strategy.

The second economic facet to earned content is that the content is essentially free (bar investment in technology to manage and use it). By and large the consumer gets the glory of being chosen, rather than any sort of costly incentive.

Through automation you can identify whos- content produces the best results in terms of sales or traffic (or whatever your goal from using earned content happens to be) and make them brand ambassadors – providing them with free goods to review and incentives to talk about you – but this is by no means an essential part of an earned content strategy. Instead, the over-riding *raison d'être* for using earned content is to form a two way communication with your customers and to use their views and their content to sell your products to their friends and your other customers.

Put simply, getting earned content to market your wares to obtain further customer engagement and increase sales should be your main key success metrics of the whole process.

### BARRIERS TO ENTRY

As our research reveals in the next section of this report, while many retailers understand what earned content is and what it can possibly achieve, many are still not sure where to start or what they need to do.

Our figures reveal that there are a number of barriers to entry – real and imagined – that businesses see as slowing or preventing them from embracing UGC.

According to this research, 29% of retailers don't think they have the proper technology to collect UGC from consumers, while 24% feel they don't have a cohesive strategy to make the most of collecting it. A similar proportion also feel that their customers don't create enough UGC for their brand – something of a chicken-and-egg situation: more earned content strategies would lead to the creation of more UGC – and 18% don't have the analytical power to measure how effective an earned content strategy might be.

In aggregate, 47% reported that a lack of technological capability was the primary reason they hadn't implemented earned content. A whopping 91% believe that earned content would fit the tone and personality of their brands. This is consistent with Olapic's experience in the marketplace.

You also have to get it right. Earned content not only has the potential to boost sales; it can also prevent disillusioned consumers from requesting refunds. Across markets, 9% of respondents have returned an item after purchasing it online because it was extremely different from the featured photo. This figure rises to 13% in the US. This high rate of forfeited sales represents a huge monetary loss for any brand, incurred by nothing more than misleading digital imagery.

What is more concerning about this phenomenon is the disappointment felt by consumers and the likelihood that they've lost trust in the brand. That is why user-generated content has become such an effective tool in a buyer's journey. It gives shoppers an authentic impression of the product ahead of purchase and provides brands with a way of guaranteeing successful sales. Placing UGC where consumers go for product information is the best way to provide an authentic view of the product and consequently encourage more confident purchases.

# Survey Results

**T**here is a clear business case for earned content and a vivid commercial context in which such a strategy sits – but what do real businesses in the UK actually know of it and how are they using it today (and looking at using it into tomorrow)?

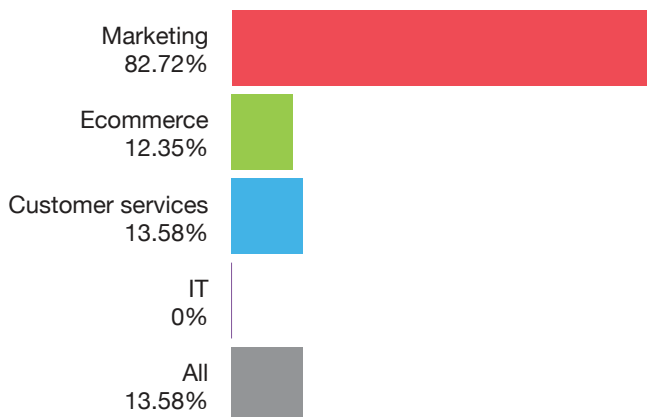
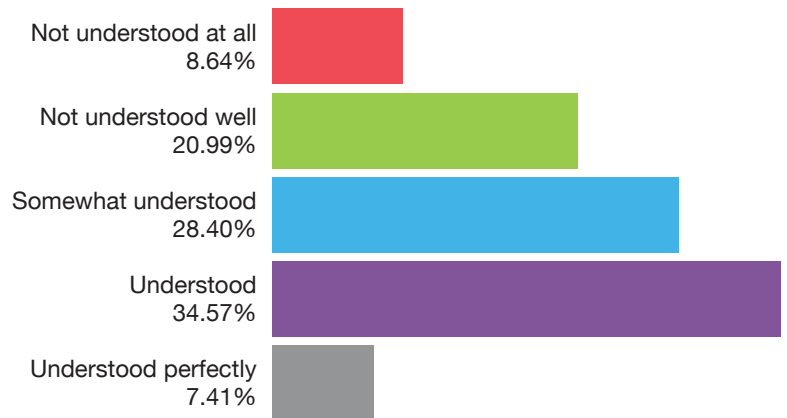
For this whitepaper we conducted a survey of C-Level and board level executives from 85 leading UK retailers

from the InternetRetailing UK Top 500 between May and July 2017 to assess their knowledge and implementation of earned content strategies and discovered some surprising things.

Overall, understanding of the strategy is high, the need to implement is considered imperative, while praxis was somewhat hard to determine. Here is what we found.

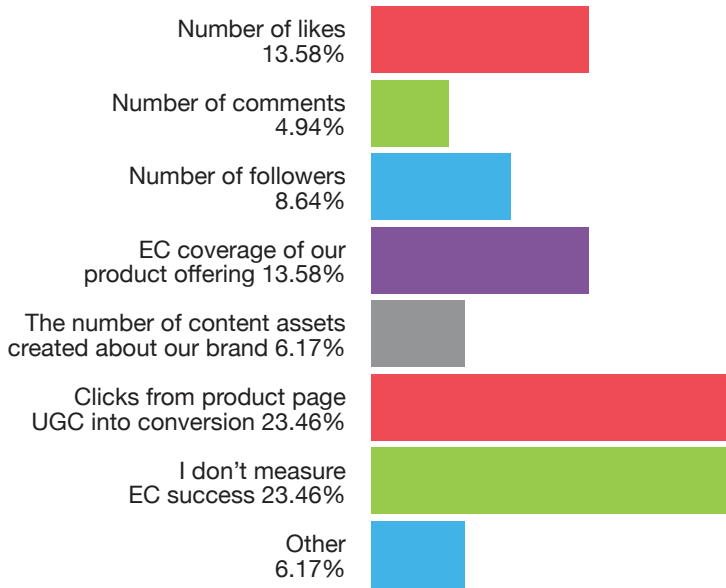
## HOW WELL UNDERSTOOD IS EARNED CONTENT WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS?

Clearly nearly two thirds of those surveyed have some understanding of earned content and its importance as a component of multichannel retail – 34% understand it well and 28% feel they somewhat understand it. However, it is the remaining 30% who don't understand it well or at all that are troubling. Social media and user generated content are nothing new in this day and age. The concept of leveraging earned content is newer, but still not that advanced. The 30% that don't feel they sufficiently understand it should be worried because at least two thirds of their competitors are likely to understand it and be using it now or soon.



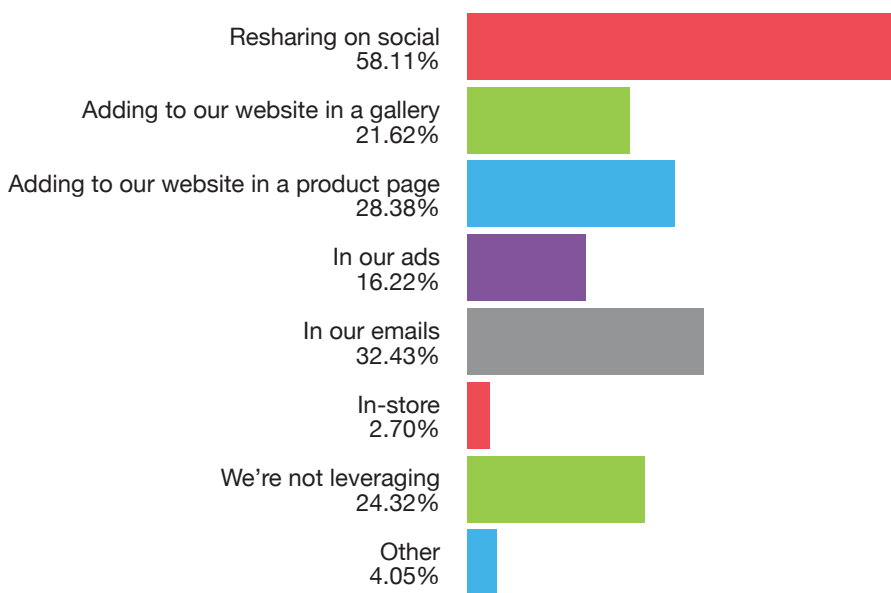
## WHERE IN YOUR BUSINESS DOES RESPONSIBILITY FOR EARNED CONTENT LIE?

Of those that are using UGC, the vast majority (82%) see it as a marketing responsibility, while 12% see it as an ecommerce operation and 14% as a customer service role. None see it as something for IT to be worried about. Most interesting are the 14% that see it as a cross-company responsibility. The whole point of earned content is that it is increasingly a driver of cross channel retail. It is largely collected and to some extent distributed on mobile, but it has a powerful role to play in marketing across all channels. It is good to see that so many brands and retailers see it as such, although there is some way to go.



**WHAT ARE YOUR KPIS FOR EARNED CONTENT?**

Staggeringly, a quarter of respondents aren't measuring earned content's success in their business. This is against a third that are measuring something – be it likes, comments, followers, or coverage. Reassuringly, 23% measure clicks from UGC to conversion and 6% measure content assets created about the brand. This is interesting as the world of earned content users seems to be split down the middle. While a third can see its use (see chart 1), a quarter aren't measuring it at all. This indicates that while awareness of earned content is growing, actually using it has some way to go here in the UK at least.



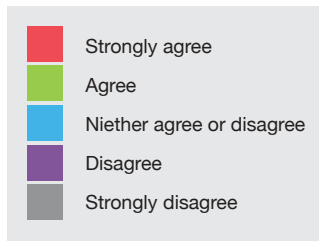
**WHERE ARE YOU LEVERAGING EARNED CONTENT?**

Building on what chart 3 on KPIs tells us, those that do understand UGC and its role are taking a soft approach to rolling it out: 58% just sharing on social suggests that many have not taken the big step of actually involving customer content in their own comms channels, such as websites.

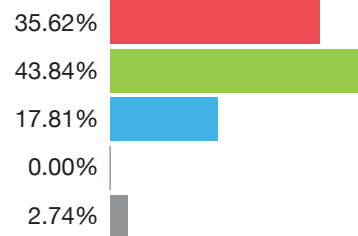


**WHERE DOES EARNED CONTENT ADD VALUE TO YOUR BUSINESS?**

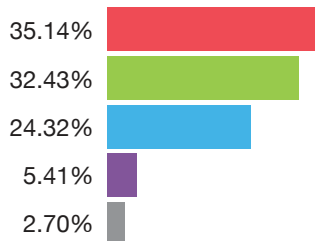
Encouragingly, the majority see earned content as a great source of product content and they understand that it resonates well with their customers – two great reasons for using it. However, around a third in each case can see no value in it, have no cohesive strategy for extracting value from it and lack resources. Almost half don't yet understand whether or not UGC 'fits brand guidelines', implying a timidity to rethink what branding means in the social media era.



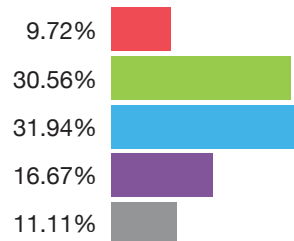
**Resonates well with consumers**



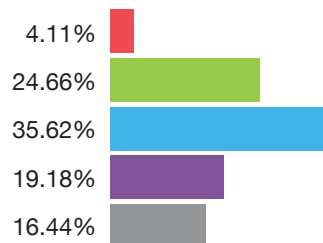
**Great source of product content**



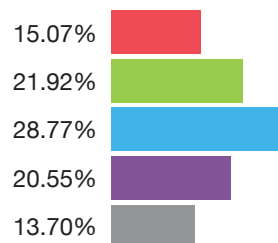
**We have an in house resource**



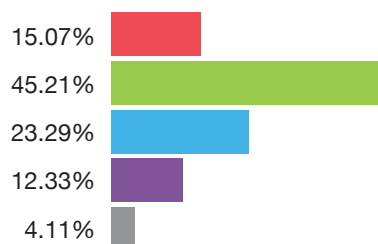
**We have a cohesive UGC strategy**



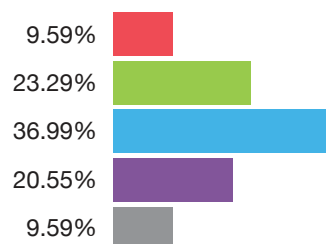
**Lack of resource**



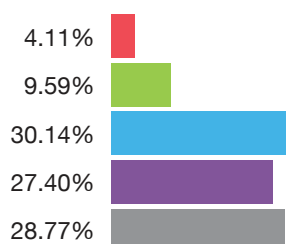
**Quality of content**



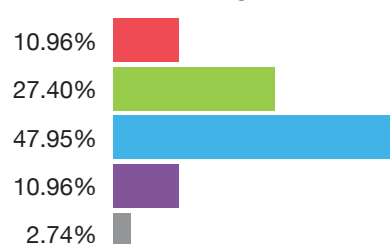
**Solutions are too expensive**

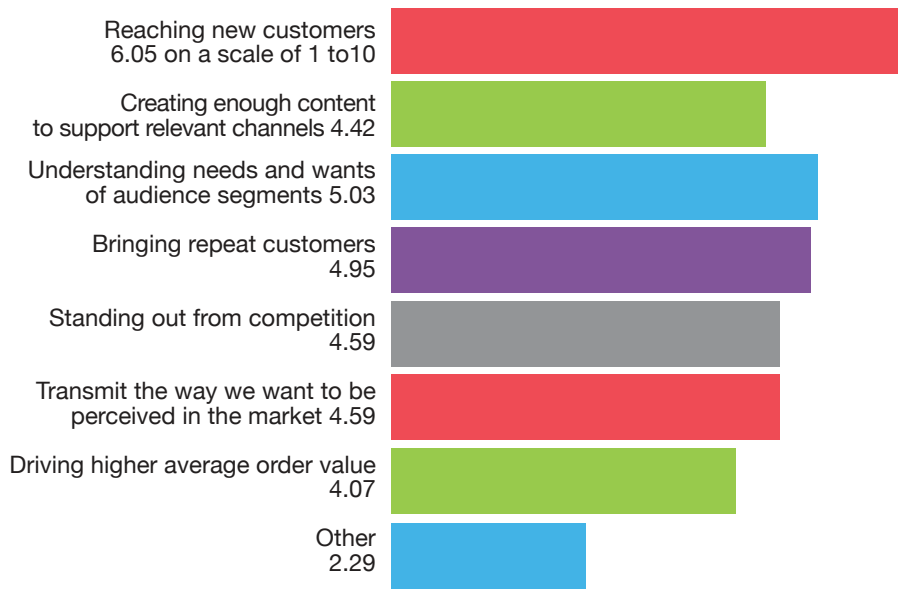


**Can't see the value**



**Fits brand guidelines**



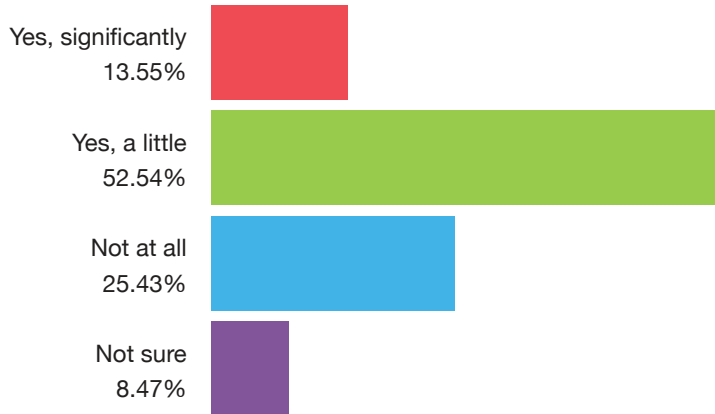


**WHAT ARE THE ARGUMENTS FOR EARNED CONTENT IN YOUR BUSINESS?**

Ranking the importance of earned content in persuading board level to invest in UGC strategies on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is most important), shows that reaching new customers is the front runner. However, creating content, understanding needs of customers, generating repeat business, standing out from the crowd, transmitting brand perception and driving higher average order values are all pretty similar in terms of importance. This suggests that of those that are looking to leverage UGC, there are many compelling reasons to do so.

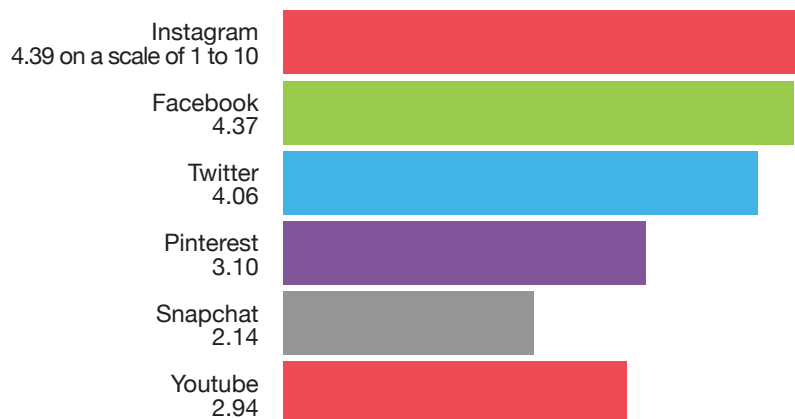
**IS VISUAL EARNED CONTENT ON THE RISE?**

Respondents were asked whether, over the past year, they had seen a rise in visual content posted around their brand and on which social networks. Altogether, 66% have seen an increase in photo and video UGC being shared, with Instagram, Facebook and Twitter all very popular.



**WHERE IS THE EARNED CONTENT?**

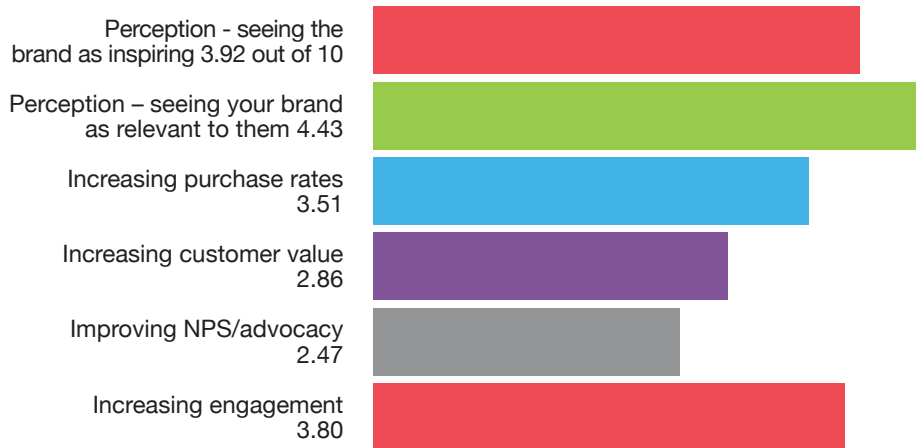
Instagram and Facebook are pretty much neck and neck when it comes to where businesses surveyed find their earned content, ranked 4.39 and 4.37 out of 10 respectively in terms of importance to retailers. Twitter is close behind. What is interesting is Youtube languishing at 2.94, showing that video isn't yet deemed as important.



**WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF EARNED CONTENT ON YOUR CUSTOMERS?**

Here we get to the heart of attitudes to earned content – with a little surprise. While UGC’s value is seen as being in “positioning the brand as inspiring”, “increasing engagement” and as “relevant to specific customers”, there is a surprising lack of its use as a way to generate brand advocacy or in increasing customer value. It appears that, although they understand the concept of UGC and acknowledge it as important, they are not using it as an excuse to interact with the customers that are taking that UGC. These results suggest that, while seeing UGC as something that brands and retailers should be using, its actual importance still experiences some drag. Perhaps, once brands start to use UGC and experiment with it as an engagement and inspiration tool, it will start to show how it can also be used for advocacy and increasing customer value.

“ Although [brands] understand the concept of UGC and acknowledge it as important, they are not using it as an excuse to interact with the customers ”



# Activating an Earned Content Strategy

“One of the biggest hurdles to an earned content strategy is that not enough UGC is generated around a specific brand”



he retail customer journey is now a complex web of micro-moments, research, decision making and purchase. In turn, the purchase process continues the intricacy by taking place across an array of devices, across a spread of time through a retailers own or third party channels.”

The wealth of channels that have opened up for retailers is a huge challenge in getting the right experience at the right moment to the shopper – in short you need to understand them, what they are doing, when they are doing it: and act accordingly.

This is where an earned content strategy comes into its own if you look upon it not only as a way of reflecting your brand, but also as an engagement channel between you and your consumers.

The key here is to look at two things: the moments that shoppers are talking about and the kind of shoppers that are doing the talking. Understanding who is saying what and when, where and why they are saying it is the starting point to understanding the kind of earned content that you can generate.

## WHO'S TALKING?

The kind of people that are talking about your brand and goods can help you understand what kind of content you are going to get. One of the biggest hurdles to an earned content strategy is that not enough UGC is generated around a specific brand. Looking at who is talking about you (and what they are talking about and when) will not only help you develop more honed strategies around your brand marketing, but will also help you generate more. Let's look at a few examples.

- **Celebrity endorsers** – the number one port of call for many brands looking to drive engagement through social media has been to employ celebrities to push their wares. According to a study by Twitter and analytics firm Annalect\* roughly 40% of respondents reported purchasing an item online after seeing it used by an influencer on Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube. Meanwhile, 20% of respondents said they shared something they saw from an influencer, while roughly 33% of millennials say they follow a creator on Twitter.

- **The long tail** – While there is much to be said for celebrity endorsement, there is growing proof that ‘ordinary’ people – the long tail of influencers with limited and narrow groups of followers – are actually more powerful overall than their celebrity counterparts. According to growing anecdotal evidence from the real world of retail, there is no direct relationship between the follower-count of a user and the amount of revenue said user's content generates for a brand.

In fact, for some brands, images shared by consumers with fewer followers tend to result in the largest conversions on retail and e-commerce experiences. When these long-tail influencers are added to a healthy mix of standard influencers and traditional celebrities, brands can achieve a balance of brand building and conversion.

- **Women** – Female shoppers drive 70 to 80% of all consumer purchasing through a combination of their buying power and influence. Moreover, global incomes of women are predicted to reach a staggering \$18 trillion by 2018, according to global professional services firm EY\*. Women have emerged as a

\* See <https://www.annalect.fi/research-instagram-influencer-marketing-finland/>



powerful demographic on social and are making their preferences abundantly clear – photoshopped models and staged photo shoots no longer resonate. These consumers are demanding more authentic and relatable content. Fortunately for brands, earned content satisfies this demand by embodying shopper sentiment, which effectively reaches consumers at a lower cost than stock photos and branded content.

- **Millennials** – Having relatable content is essential to Millennial shoppers. Nearly a third of Millennials say they are more likely to buy a product if the brand’s content isn’t “sales-y” and instead feels authentic and honest. Millennial shoppers are also turning to one another for inspiration and validation in the purchase process. Compared to Baby Boomers, Millennials are more than three times more likely to use Facebook and Instagram to discover new products.

Sharing fan content builds meaningful consumer relationships for retail and e-commerce brands. In fact, 62% of Millennials say that if a brand engages with them on social, they are more likely to become a loyal customer. Seeing their photo shared on a favourite brand’s Instagram account, website, or email campaign is a source of excitement for fans, and proves that the brand recognizes their individual personalities.

- **All together now** – While each of these individual demographics is essential when looking at who is talking about you, it is important to remember that your earned content strategy has to pull them all together. Sure, some brands don’t attract customers from across all age ranges and all social groups, but it is unlikely that any successful brand is targeting just one small demographic. To succeed you have to bring together all – both endorsers and the long tailers – to create a sophisticated UGC strategy that can draw on both. With earned content informing not only sales and marketing, but also product development and usage, it is vital to look at who is talking and how they are talking and work them into a coherent and aligned strategy.

### WHEN ARE THEY TALKING?

As we have already seen, most consumers are mobile – and most of the social content they are creating and sharing is coming from mobile devices via the mobile versions of key social platforms.

This constant stream of content has fundamentally changed how shoppers interact with each other and the world and has created a world view made up of millions of ‘micro-moments’ that are unique to the individual and, while taken together can offer a view of a customer journey, are often too fragmented to truly analyse and understand without the intervention of technology.

Certainly, there are moments that inherently stand out. As a basic example, when a consumer purchases a new home, he or she may be most interested in offers for new furniture. But more often, as a result of mobile disruption, the consumer journey has been fractured into hundreds of smaller decision-making moments across all stages, including post-purchase.

According to Google Think, there are four micro-moments that teams must consider when designing meaningful consumer experiences:

- **“I-want-to-know” moments** – According to a study at Columbia University, people are now more likely to remember where to find information than they are to remember the information itself. In the context of the customer journey this finding holds true, as 65% of online consumers look up more information online now versus just a few years ago. What does it mean for marketers looking to engage during these moments? By creating more informational and authentic customer experiences, using consumers’ own content, brands can drive traffic and loyalty toward owned properties and away from competition.

- **“I-want-to-go” moments** – Consumers now use their mobile devices to find places to shop, eat, and entertain themselves while on the move. In fact, in

“ For  
marketers  
looking to  
capitalize on the  
“I-want-to-do”  
moments, again,  
adding utility to  
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the past year, the “near me” search interest has doubled! Additionally, 82% of smartphone users rely on a search engine when looking for a local business, and 73% lose trust in a business when its online information isn’t updated. This has created the need for geolocation and beacon technology, where brands are able to engage consumers with relevant messaging when they are near a store location. Through implementing relevant visual earned content, retail and e-commerce brands can showcase product benefits at the most relevant moment possible: when a consumer is geographically near to the business and seeking information.

- **“I-want-to-do” moments** – Today, 91% of smartphone users turn to their phones for ideas while doing a task, and 100 million plus hours of “how-to” content have been watched on YouTube so far this year. Perhaps you’ve also fallen in love with the BuzzFeedFood “how-to” video format? For marketers looking to capitalize on the “I-want-to-do” moments, again, adding utility to the consumers’ lives is critical. We’ve found that brands using consumer-generated content have more success because they allow the consumers to educate one another on the use and style options of various products. In turn, this can increase a customer’s confidence in producing the same results exemplified by users in branded earned content.

- **“I-want-to-buy” moments** – Finally, the point of purchase... Traditionally, this is where retail and e-commerce brands excel, but the new buying journey has diluted the process. Marketers now have to work harder than ever to succeed in this moment. In-store, 82% of smartphone users consult their phones while deciding what to buy, likely looking up product reviews and related user-generated imagery. Meanwhile, the industry has seen a 29% increase in mobile conversion rates in the past year. These moments demonstrate that consumers are ready to be sold to by a brand. However, it’s difficult to tell when, or where, these moments will occur. People decide to buy at home on desktop, or on the go via their mobile devices. By setting up a sophisticated program in the moments leading up to “I-want-to-buy,” brands can draw on behavioural cues to trigger conversion-based messaging once a customer is ready to receive it.

Additionally, in making earned content shoppable directly on social networks like Instagram, brands can shorten the consumer path and create frictionless purchasing opportunities.

### GETTING THEM TALKING

Having identified who the ‘tribes’ are that are likely to create UGC for you and understanding the moments in which they are doing things, engaging and then amplifying consumers to talk to you is the final part of the activation phase of setting up and running an earned content strategy.

The key here is not what sorts of incentives you can offer – aside, of course, from what you have to pay celebrity ambassadors – and that comes down to making them feel good and making their content look good. Showing off what their excellent work has done and celebrating them is only going to fuel more content from more people, all chasing the feel good factor of being shown off as cool and discerning by brands they themselves consider cool. Here’s how:

- **Online** – Visual content needs to be shown off and building galleries on your website of the best images from your customers is one simple way to showcase it. But it pays to be clever: why just display the lovely images when you can link specific images to specific products and to specific reviews and let the UGC do the work for you? Shots of users actually using your goods and saying lovely things about them – especially if you can link them directly to product SKUs – can improve dwell time and is proven to promote actual purchases.

- **Mobile** – While mobile has become the content generation tool that powers the UGC you need for your earned content strategy, so too has it become a place where it can be put to use. As with your website, a great looking app and m-web

presence is essential and, with consumers increasingly coming to you across all touchpoints it is essential to offer consistency. Getting UGC looking good – and making it shoppable – on mobile properties as well as on the ‘normal’ web is essential.

- **Social media** – Social media, like mobile, is the reason we are looking at earned content, but it can also be used to great effect to reward long tail contributors, amplify their content and encourage more from them – and to inspire others to join in. Asking for permission to use content via social fuels interest in the content and in the content creator. It also gives them something to share – and again shares your brand with their followers. Judicious use of the right hashtags can generate yet more interest, which can yield both more content and more traffic to your site – which hopefully leads to more sales, more brand insights and more data from which to build loyalty and customer experience.

- **Marketing materials** – Great content, especially visuals, can be added to email marketing and digital advertising to both aid consistency across channels, as well as generating better response rates and interactions. Simply by swapping expensive brand-owned creative for earned content generated by consumers, brands can boost awareness, increase click-through rates, maximize reach and decrease acquisition costs. Similarly, retail and e-commerce emails, often triggered through automation tools after specific customer-intent behaviour, see increased effectiveness with earned content. Brands are able to drive more revenue, transaction value, and brand engagement through trigger and promotional emails that feature customer photos. Seeing their content in action rewards and encourages more content to be generated, as shoppers receiving or viewing the collateral have a sense of ‘it could’ve been me and my content’ and so will engage.

- **Offline** – Customer content can also be used to bolster in-store displays, print advertising, TV ads and more. Witness Apple’s iPhone7S camera ad across TV, print and billboard in the UK, which showed portraits taken using just an iPhone7S. Apple has form with this, using iPhone UGC photography in several of its billboard campaigns around various iterations of its phone. Despite living in the digital age, it is still the apogee of mainstream acceptance of one’s creativity to see its fruits displayed in ‘old’ media – it is such an untargeted format that it is, in some ways, the ultimate accolade: your content is good enough for everyone, not just your niche. Again, this is very rewarding to content creators and fuels a desire to produce ever better UGC, which pays great dividends for your earned content strategy.



# Curating your Earned Content



We have seen how to elicit content from a range of target groups to help build your earned content strategy – we shall henceforth discount paid for celebrity endorsements – now comes the hard bit: managing it all on an on-going basis.

This curation part of the strategy broadly takes in four key steps, which have to be applied to all in-coming content. They form the backbone of the strategy and go on for as long as you want to generate content.

We shall take a look at what the steps are, how to keep on top of them, how technology can help and lead up to the final part of the puzzle: how to analyse what is happening so you can constantly tweak and improve the curation phase either around changing products, seasons, consumers, weather, technology, or any other variable that might impact your business.

But first a look at the four steps in content curation:

“Once you have a hashtag in place, you can collect images and videos from all major platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, and Vine”

## STEP 1: COLLECTING THE CONTENT

For some brands, there is already a wealth of high-quality visual earned content being shared by customers. For other brands, there is a need to devise an intelligent hashtag strategy to solicit new content. Regardless of which area you identify with more, you can never have too much earned content. With that, here are some considerations when developing the most actionable hashtag:

- Create a simple hashtag. It should be easy to spell and remember.
- Make sure your hashtag is on brand and one that all stakeholders feel comfortable using long term.
- Research the usage and popularity of your hashtag prior to implementation to ensure that it's unique. While it is possible to shift your earned content strategy with new hashtags, it's a challenge that is best avoided through some up-front legwork.
- Use title case when necessary to make the hashtag more easily understood (For example, “#WeLoveBrandX”).
  - Of course, there are also some areas you'll want to avoid when considering a hashtag strategy.
- Avoid generic hashtags (i.e. #Shoes or #Home). You'll lose the connection to your brand and open it up to an enormous amount of spam potential.
- Don't solicit answers or content from open-ended questions without considering the responses you may receive.
- Don't use too many hashtags at a given time.
- Choose hashtags that don't have an adverse meaning in different languages.

Once you have a hashtag in place, you can collect images and videos from all major platforms, including Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr. By placing your hashtag across all channels, you'll increase your brand's ability to drive interest and submissions.

Cat Footwear, a division of Wolverine World Wide, is an Olapic client with a comprehensive hashtag strategy. They've placed their hashtag on shoeboxes, flyers, handouts at live events, and on billboards across Latin America. They also have the hashtag in-store on window displays across each of their 120 locations worldwide.

## STEP 2: PICKING THE 'BEST' CONTENT

Here is where things get tricky. What looks 'best' is subjective and so picking what you want can be hard. Given the vast amount of social visual content that you are likely to be dealing with, automation is already the best method for collecting and curating content – but here it can play another role: it can be emotionless and neutral, selecting content based on clear criteria rather than



the “Ooh that looks nice” principle that humans bring to the party. Here technology comes into its own. First up it can crawl the web looking for hashtags that meet your needs as described above. It can then, using complex algorithms, analyse many data points in each picture to select the ones that will be ‘best’ for your campaign.

I keep putting ‘best’ in parentheses because it won’t necessarily be the best bit of content in simple terms, but the best when assessed over up to 100 elements by the system.

First of all, it will cut out any content showing anything explicit, smoking, swearing and other things – including competitors.

Algorithms will then look at many other elements of the pictures that make it through the first phase and start to rank images, videos and content in order of ‘conversion power’. This is based on what the system already knows about what works and what doesn’t, as well as learning from every single bit of content that it then uses to refine this knowledge.

In fact, when a computer was asked to rank the conversion power of photos based on colour, caption and composition only against a human, the machine won. Humans are biased.

The advantage of using technology to run this part of the process is that they can not only analyse many, many data points in each photo, rank them and post them in the right places, they can also do it at scale. Olapic’s system currently checks some 20million data points each day. And it learns from each and every one of them so it gets better and better.

But the machines haven’t taken over completely: humans are still needed to moderate and check over what has been picked. For all its sophistication, image recognition isn’t 100% fool proof and there are occasions when the machines make a bad call. But by this point the tsunami of content has been whittled down to a manageable amount, ready for the humans to take charge.

### **STEP 3: OBTAINING RIGHTS TO USE IT**

Before any of it can be used, however, the creator of each bit of content needs to be asked for the right to use it. Not only is this polite, but it builds vital relationships between the brand and the creator-consumer. Reach out to the consumer, let them know you appreciate the image and express that you would like their permission to use their content in future marketing efforts.

If a consumer declines to let you use their content, you must respect their decision and leave their photo be; after all, with 95 million posts uploaded to Instagram each day, there’s no shortage to choose from. Overall some 60% of rights requests are granted.

This part of the process is vital to ensuring that you are doing right by your content creators, as well as making it impossible to not offer authentic UGC – which is a vital part of any earned content strategy. Without authentic – and authenticated – content the whole thing becomes meaningless.

### **STEP 4: MAPPING THE CONTENT TO YOUR PRODUCTS**

The final part of the process is to tag the images/content and assign them to products or tag them for use in specific ways. This way you can not only build a media library of content that you can assign to products, campaigns or marketing, but you can also use it as shoppable content. This part of the process may seem prosaic compared to the wizardry of how machines can pick the images, but it is just as vital to the overall process as this is where you get to make your offerings consistent across channels, or make content and messaging specific for the channels you are using. Most platforms that help you do this will plug into all parts of your marketing and ecommerce systems so can distribute content wherever you tell it to go. It can also, as we shall see in the next section, learn from what you do and constantly refine the process.

# Analysing Earned Content Impact

**T**his brings us to the final phase of an effective earned content strategy: Analyse. Unsurprisingly, given the relative ease of measurement, in a WBR-Olapic study, it was found that 42% of respondents are already analysing the “engagement” of their earned content across channels, followed by “analysing sales and conversions” with 31%, and finally “analysing brand awareness and publicity” with 25%.

It’s encouraging that 81% of respondents are already measuring effectiveness in some capacity, but those measuring all three criteria have a distinct advantage over their competition. But to gain an advantage you need to measure more than that – you need to use your earned content management platform to measure engagement, as well as metrics such as influence on sales, and lift in revenue from earned content.

Recall the concept of the ‘long-tail influencer’: for many retail and e-commerce brands, accurate measurement can help identify individuals’ content with relatively low follower-count and engagement, but enormously high conversion results. This creates an opportunity for “consumer delight,” where brands can engage unsuspecting users with free products and incentives, further driving up loyalty and the propensity to create similar high-performance content.

While the adoption of earned content hasn’t yet reached critical mass for retailers and e-commerce brands, our experience indicates that the industry is reaching a crucial moment in its lifecycle. Driven by changing consumer behaviour, brands are now fully recognising the need to tap into earned content as a way to engage and convert their consumers. As a result, the industry has moved past early adoption and into late adoption. Now, the task is continuing to innovate and increase the ability to measure effectiveness, and connect the dots across all channels.



### SO WHAT SORT OF RESULTS DO YOU SEE?

According to Forrester Research’s Total Economic Impact of Olapic report\* one major US specialty retailer saw ROI on its investment in UGC handling of 680%, an NPV of \$2.2million and payback in under a month.

AB testing for social campaign produced 15% more orders and 11% reduction in cost of acquisition verses branded content, while conversion improved from 0.79% to 2.82% when consumers interacted with the UGC

Before implementing the UGC management technology, the company was able to collect some 700 images per week. After installation, this rose to 1500 thanks to automated collection and permission approval. It also helped create far more brand ambassadors.

As a result the company saw \$374million in three year revenues involving UGC impressions, \$182million in three-year revenues involving UGC interaction and \$5.1million in three-year consecutive revenue attribution to brand ambassadors.

### SO WHAT SHOULD YOU BE ANALYSING?

- **Time on site** – Does your UGC increase the length of time that shoppers spend on your site? This is the simplest metric with which to assess whether earned content is having what you do. The longer people stay the more likely they are to convert, so looking at how long those stay on a UGC-ed version of your site verses one without can be a simple metric of earned content success.
- **Conversion rates** – The direct impact of longer dwell times is that conversions should go up. While measurement of dwell times can be a measure of whether UGC is helping or not, you can also look to measure conversions to assess whether the strategy is working. Also, changes and improvements – which you should be making to your earned content and website design strategy anyway – can be measured in terms of conversions. You can also assess where in the purchase path UGC deployment yields the best results.
- **Bounce rates** – Conversely to measuring dwell times and conversions, looking at how quickly people leave the site is another useful metric. In terms of earner content, you are looking for what content and where in the purchase path leads to decreases in bounce rates.
- **Reach** – Getting on well-connected brand ambassador to share you to their network can reach huge numbers of people. Compared to traditional marketing it may not reach as many, but it will reach much more engaged and more likely to also share. Measuring this reach, however, is hard to do. You can get a baseline view by looking at who your advocates are and how many followers they have. You can also measure, using hashtags, how many shares you are getting. Balancing this reach against the cost of managing the UGC process against conversion rates gives a metric as to how cost effective your strategy is.

Ref.	Metric	Calculation	Initial	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
A1	Pre-Olapic images collected per week	Customer provided		700	700	700
A2	Post-Olapic images collected per week	Year 1: customer provided Years 2 and 3: assumption		1,500	1,800	2,000
A3	Approval rate of images to be used	Customer provided		40%	40%	40%
A4	Annual approved user-generated images for use	A2*A3*52		31,200	37,440	41,600
A5	Image collection growth	(A2-A1)/A1		114%	157%	186%
A6	Additional F I E avoidance	(A5/1)+1		2.1	2.6	2.9
A7	Marketing resource salary	E1		\$60,000	\$61,800	\$63,654
At	Content collection efficiency	A7*A6		\$128,571	\$158,914	\$181,869
	Risk adjustment	↓10%				
<b>Atr</b>	<b>Content collection efficiency (risk-adjusted)</b>		<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$115,714</b>	<b>\$143,023</b>	<b>\$163,682</b>

Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

\* The Total Economic Impact TM of Olapic, Forrester Research, <http://www.olapic.com/forrester-tei/>

# Case Studies: Practice of the Best

## ALLSAINTS: #itsuptoyou UGC campaign boosts traffic and sales

British fashion retailer AllSaints was looking to reach new audiences and engage existing customers in new ways. The brand also wanted to showcase how global consumers were styling themselves with its clothes and working AllSaints items into their overall fashion 'look'. The retailer chose to run a global UGC campaign across social media using the hashtag #ItsUpToYou and worked with Olapic to help manage and select the images that were set to pour in.

The campaign began with an internal soft launch that enabled staff members to understand the campaign and encouraged them to get involved by uploading their own photography.

When the campaign officially launched externally a week later, all stores already had seeded consumers' imagery, displayed across channels such as the point of sale, in a specific gallery on AllSaints' website, and on social media profiles.

The #ItsUpToYou campaign was supported by a strong multi-channel communication strategy, including promotion through a campaign-specific video, social advertising, and across the brand's homepage and email assets. AllSaints directed the audience to the gallery page so people could immediately see and engage with the user-generated content resulting from the campaign.

Alongside AllSaints own channel promotion, the campaign also benefited from collaboration with new and existing influencers, bloggers, and popular Instagrammers, helping extend the reach beyond a typical target audience.

Six weeks after the campaign launch, the positive results were clear. The brand's promotional video reached 11 million views, the influencers network brought 323,000 engagements and the campaign reached a further 17 million people organically. During this period, 66,000 users visited the campaign website gallery, with 48,000 of them being net new visitors, and 82% of all gallery visitors returned to allsaints.com.

Furthermore, the campaign also attracted the media with press coverage in *ELLE France*, *Fashion Mag* and *Drapers*.

The volume of website visitors surpassed all expectations, and the engagement also led to direct revenue, with £12,000 in sales being generated from people who interacted with the user-generated content on the gallery page. This is a definitive testimony to the power that real consumer imagery can have in influencing purchase decisions.

"We were extremely pleased with the results of the #ItsUpToYou campaign and the Olapic team and technology played a significant part in making it happen," says Cass Gowing, Global Social Media Manager at AllSaints. "Utilising UGC and empowering our global customers through the celebration of their unique and individual style is a key strategy for AllSaints moving forward. We are planning to roll out more campaigns with Olapic as well as integrate UGC into our BAU strategy through an evergreen gallery and a widget on our product pages. We're excited to see the next stage of results"





### PEPE JEANS: #GetItOnChallenge uses video UGC to drive product launch

Earned content can be an ideal way to launch a new product, stirring up interest and creating a buzz around the product. This is exactly what Pepe Jeans London had in mind with its #GetItOnChallenge for the launch of its new Powerflex jeans.

The idea was that the jeans are so springy that you can (possibly) put them on with no hands. The company took an interesting path: starting with a celebrity endorsement to kick start a UGC campaign. It employed Georgia May Jagger – model daughter of deft hip-swinger and Rolling Stone, Sir Mick Jagger – to get the ball rolling, filming her wiggling her way into the jeans with no hands and laid down the #GetItOnChallenge across social media, looking for people to send in videos of themselves wrestling into the jeans – enticed with a free pair of jeans if they succeeded.

The brand promoted this campaign across multiple channels and initiatives: First, through a network of well-known Instagram and Youtube influencers, asking them to post their own videos accomplishing the difficult task; then through instore promotions prompting more challenges to take place at many of the retailer's global locations; and lastly through

a variety of other communications including social media advertising, dynamic email marketing, PR placements, print displays, e-commerce pages and above the line advertising.

In just over one and a half months, more than 1,500 people across 25 countries participated in the brand's campaign, surpassing its expected goal of 500 consumer videos by over 300%. The initial promotional video received more than 2 million views on YouTube, and the campaign reached 33million people globally.

"We had the difficult challenge of promoting our new Powerflex jeans with a campaign that involved getting people semi-naked in front of a camera," explains Txerra Pardinás, Head of Innovation and Social Media at Pepe Jeans London. "This is why it was important to promote our UGC video gallery across all channels to inspire others to take the challenge once they saw that so many others, including influencers they like and trust, were already doing it. Olapic was very supportive in the planning and development of this campaign, helping us aggregate the enormous volume of content shared socially and making it easy for us to showcase the video gallery on our challenge website."

## WOOL AND THE GANG: Making knitting kits hip

Wool and the Gang is a unique knitted fashion experience that offers consumers the opportunity to buy knitting and crochet kits, that contain everything needed to make their own piece, or buy finished products that have been handcrafted by a Gang member in their homes. Anyone from anywhere in the world can subscribe to be part of the Gang and start knitting for the brand.

The company needed to easily identify everyone in their network of knitters, to celebrate their success and engage that community. They also wanted to improve ecommerce conversions by adding visual content to show how the finished knitwear would look.

Wool and the Gang started collecting User-

Generated Content through the hashtags #ShareYourKnits and #MadeUnique.

Using Olapic's PhotoRank technology they were able to automate the process of selecting the best photos to publish in a gallery on their website. Olapic also integrated with their product feed to add UGC to Product Detail Pages.

Wool and the Gang is now collecting over 3,000 pieces of UGC per month, including photos and videos. This is 67% more than before they began using Olapic. The number of visitor interactions with UGC photos on Product Detail Pages has increased by 6X since launch—leading to an average order value that is 24% higher for visitors who interact with UGC.

# 12 Takeaways

## 1 SHOPPERS LOVE TO SHARE

The main tenet of any UGC and earned content strategy is that consumers already love to share what they are doing, buying and liking – ‘all’ you have to do is tap into that love of sharing, join their conversation and get them to love you back. Get them to do this by rewarding them with the glory of their content being used and making them part of the story.

## 2 VISUAL CONTENT WORKS BEST

Visual content works best as we tend to process images much more rapidly than we do words, with the bulk of shoppers (52%) finding photos the most appealing, with video catching up on 27%. Short-form video content is rapidly becoming a medium of choice for many social media users, so it pays to keep an eye on video becoming a more integral part of your strategy in the coming months and years. So, gearing your earned content campaigns around visual media – by asking for photos or videos, it's that simple – will help you get the kind of content that works best for you from the get go.

## GET THEM HASHTAGGING AND ♥-ING

### 3

The key to building an effective earned content campaign is to make sure that you get shoppers loving and hashtagging images and videos with the correct tags, so they are easily identifiable, avoid being connected with unrelated content, and content providers feel part of a ‘movement and that the content providers feel part of a ‘movement’. Most consumers will adopt brand hashtag if you ask them to, often around things they have purchased and want to share or a product or service that they have enjoyed. Half of consumers would ‘♥’ you and hashtag you if they appreciate what your product has done for them.

## 4 KNOW WHO IS DOING IT

To start to leverage UGC in earned content campaigns and strategic deployments you have to also understand who your customers are and who is posting, hastagging and ‘♥ ing your products. In the US sharing of photo-based UGC is almost evenly split between men and women. In the UK it is more uneven, with men out in front. However, globally this is shifting. Women have increasing spending power and so their social media influence is on the rise. Also millennials are much more avid users of social media and are much more swayed by its influence. However, don't write off other generational groups – UGC is becoming something that everyone is using.

## 5 WHERE ARE THEY DOING IT?

While the most enjoyed social content is visual, the social media platforms where it is being disseminated are not limited to just those that focus on visuals. Yes, Instagram is the go-to platform for 32% of UGC interaction (especially among millennials), but Facebook has a 28% hold too. Twitter and Pinterest merely take 9 and 6% respectively, but your brand may be different, so check where your ‘fans’ are. When it comes to looking for earned content, 30% of consumers head to the brands own website – so make sure that you are making full use of it on your site.

## 6 BUILD TRUST

Shoppers consider UGC and earned content to be more honest than anything else that they are going to read online about products. 50% of Americans consider it the most trusted source of information on brands and products, as do 44% of Europeans. But it has to be authentic and has to be seen to be trustworthy, helpful and

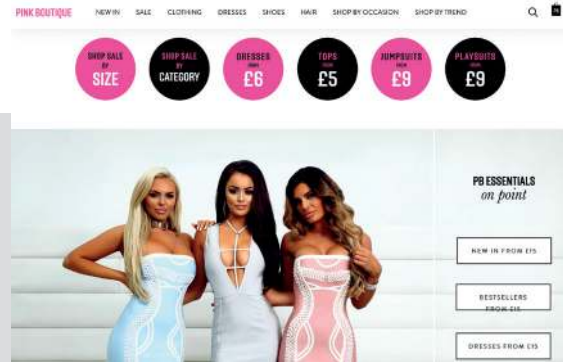
## PINK BOUTIQUE: Seeing the value of UGC

Pink Boutique sells fashion to the unashamedly glam girl. It is a B2C business that employs over 70 people and has an international customer base. 2017 has become the year that it focusses on UGC as a key priority for its marketing and social media teams and as such is at the start of its journey.

So how is it going?

According to MD Dan Arden: “Pink Boutique is focussing significantly on UGC in 2017 and this is a key priority of the Social Media team. This will include encouraging customers to share their experiences of our product and using these assets to market the range using real life experiences. We also continue to focus on generating customer reviews and product feedback to support our customers in their buying experience.”

Pink Boutique has a robust social media marketing strategy that covers all of the social channels, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest,



Twitter and YouTube. The brand has a strategy to maximise both organic and paid marketing initiatives and measures reach, engagement and ROAS across each of these channels.

The company has turned to third parties to make its fledgling UGC strategy work, outsourcing the moderation and the collection of UGC to streamline how it works.

Arden again: “Pink Boutique is currently working with relevant third parties that can effectively collect and moderate content on the brand’s behalf. This ensures that we have a robust process in place to manage the UGC strategy.”

relevant. Publicising (and linking to) the supplier of the content is key, as is picking content that accurately reflects your brand, product or service – even if it’s not perhaps how your marketing department may choose to portray it. In the UK, 24% of shoppers prefer product focussed images to convey authenticity while 21% think it more important to feature real people

### 7 ALWAYS GET THE RIGHTS

When selecting content to use always make sure that you seek out the rights to use it from the person that created the content. It maybe imagery of your product labelled with your hashtag, but it’s their photo or video, so ask permission. This is a key part in building trust with not only your content creators, but also those that view, use and share your UGC as it helps authenticate the content, the creator and your brand. You can also use social media to publically ask for the rights, garnering that little extra bit of coverage.

### 8 BE CONSISTENT

While branding and use of images needs to be consistent across all your channels, you also have to be consistent with what your consumers are saying. In fashion there has been a backlash against photoshopped models and unrealistic looks – you have to match this. The likes of AllSaints, Pepe Jeans and Calvin Klein have all embraced this and developed earned content campaigns that centre around real people – consistent with what their customers want and are saying.

### 9 FOLLOW THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Earned content has a clear role to play in the shopping journey, but understanding where in that journey to most effectively deploy it is vital – and perhaps the most tricky part of the whole process. More than half of European shoppers seem to like using UGC during the pre-shopping phase of the customer

journey, using it as a research tool. Interestingly, men are more likely to use UGC in the shopping phase than women.

### 10 LET TECHNOLOGY HELP YOU

Finding, selecting, managing and curating the vast amount of content out there is a daunting task – and one which is really outside the ability of mere humans. You would need to employ a warehouse fully of people to assess all the content to even have a chance of managing it all on a day-to-day basis. Also humans are biased and won’t necessarily pick the right images that have the most potential to engage other users. Luckily, there are platforms that can do all that for you – right through to posting content on the channels of your choice. But be warned: you may need humans to moderate any selected content before it is posted, just in case.

### 11 ANALYSE AND LEARN

While technology can take the legwork out of selecting the right content for the job, such systems also have the added advantage that they produce detailed data about what is going on with your earned content. Such tech can constantly learn what works and what doesn’t, endlessly refining what it does so that your earned media earns its own keep. This intelligence can also then be applied to new campaigns to help you constantly grow and evolve your engagement.

### 12 MAKE IT FUN

Remember that it also has to be fun. Yes, you are using earned content to up sales, but to engage consumers – both in supplying content and in engaging with it – you have to delight and entertain them. Hashtag campaigns that require funny video or interesting photos that showcase people’s skills are always good; but above all make sure that its fun and something that people will enjoy being involved with.



# Summary

The challenge of multi-channel retail is to stand out from the crowd and to engage consumers. To do this, retailers need two things: loads of compelling content and a rapport with their customers.

While there is no magic bullet, the adoption of earned content as a marketing strategy can fulfil both of these demands – and bring many other benefits besides.

Consumers love to share and are increasingly happy to share third party branded content – especially images – with their communities if that product makes them feel good, look good and conveys the lifestyle choices they wish to espouse.

Brands meanwhile can hugely benefit from using this content to highlight how great their products are and, perhaps most importantly of all, that their users say so, not the company.

And this is the crux of what makes earned content such a strong tool for retailers. Consumers trust the views of ‘ordinary’ people over that of the company or even celebs. They want to try and buy the things they see their friends recommending and enjoying. Even when it comes from someone they don’t know, they are more inclined to act on it than if the messaging comes direct from the brand or a marketing source.

That’s the idea: but how do you do it in practice? In this white paper we show how valuable earned content is and outline how, through the right messaging and promotion you can entice consumers to create your content for you.

We also take an in depth look at how to manage that content using the latest technology to assess what will work best and, through detailed analysis, how to increasingly choose better and better content and greater ever more engaging earned content campaigns.

If you are considering using earned content as a way to engage with your customers and enhance your standing on the web – and you all should be – then we can show you how in this white paper.



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