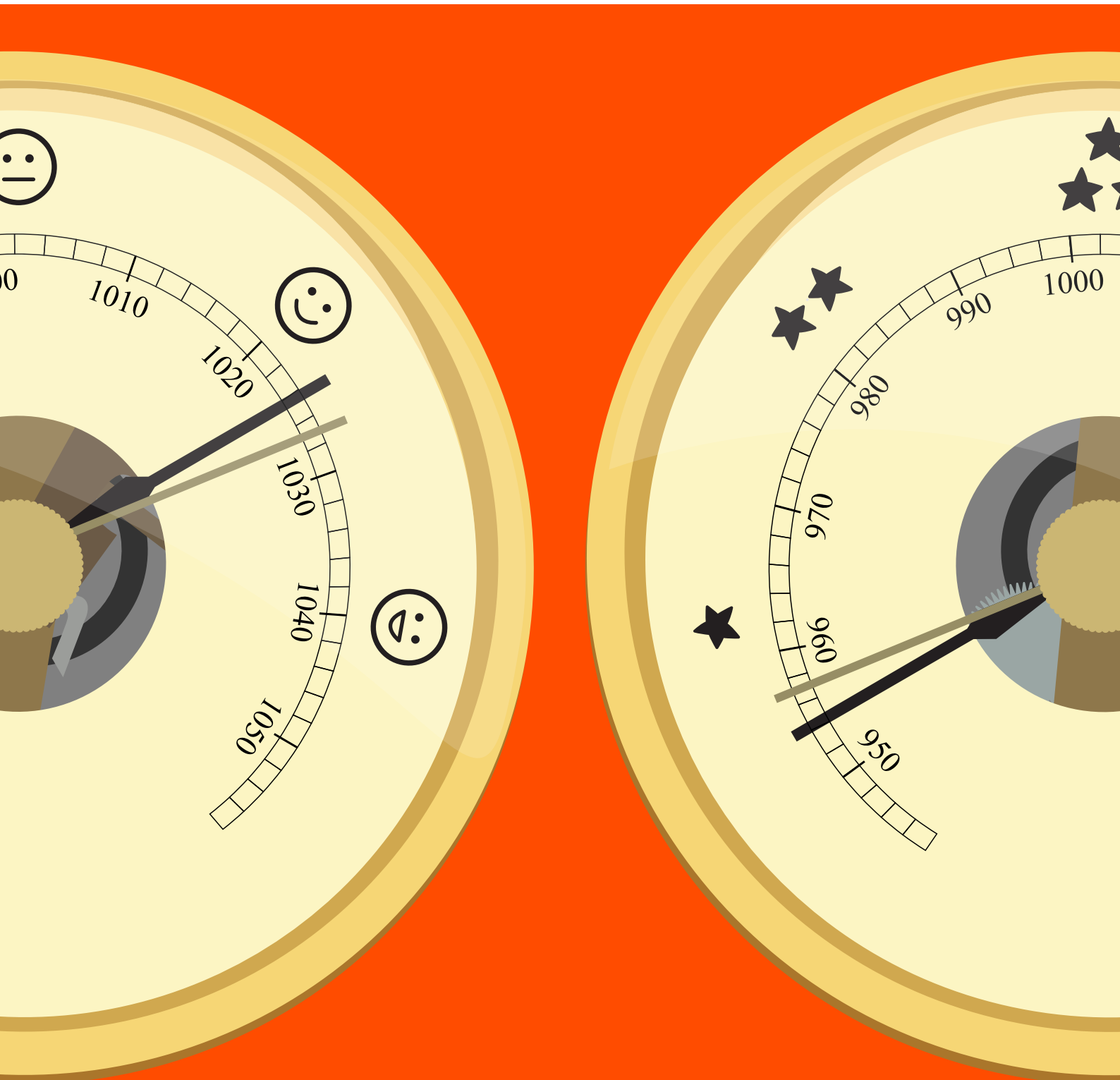


THE RETAIL SOCIAL PROOF BAROMETER

HOW TOP RETAILERS MATCH UP TO CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS



The Retail Social Proof Barometer

How top retailers match up to consumer expectations

People buy from people. While this core sales principle has been driving revenue in physical retail for decades, many eCommerce businesses are unsure how best to help customers conveniently discover the right products online.

Social proof tactics offer a cost-effective and scalable way to recreate the person-to-person experience by showing shoppers which products are resonating with their peers.

But with the broad range of possible social proof tactics available, finding the right mix for your brand can be tricky.

We embarked on extensive research, matching the web and email initiatives of 50 IRUK Top 500 retailers with the opinions of 2000 British consumers to find out what consumers expect, and which tactics help lead to a purchase. Along the way, we've discovered which brands are excelling in social proof, and who is just scratching the surface.

Keep reading to discover:

- **The three key pillars of social proof** – wisdom of the crowd, user and celebrity social proof
- **The tactics that shoppers expect** when making a purchase decision
- **The brands that harness social proof well** and the ones who are just scratching the surface
- **How to determine the right mix for your brand**

Contents

User social proof	4
Ratings and reviews	4
User Generated Content (UGC)	9
Wisdom of the crowd	13
Product recommendations	13
Popularity messaging	16
Celebrity & influencer social proof	19
Key findings at a glance	23
Top retailers	23
Top verticals	24
Action points for retailers	25

USER SOCIAL PROOF



When making a purchasing decision, consumers look for unbiased sources of information. Shoppers are also more inclined to be influenced by the people most similar to them - fellow customers. Retailers can leverage the power of user social proof with User Generated Content (UGC), specifically product ratings, reviews and customer photos.

Ratings & reviews

Product ratings and reviews increase consumer trust in your brand because they come directly from customers who have used your products. Retailers can collect this authentic feedback from existing customers, and display this alongside product information on the website and in emails to reassure shoppers as they research and compare options.

What do consumers want?

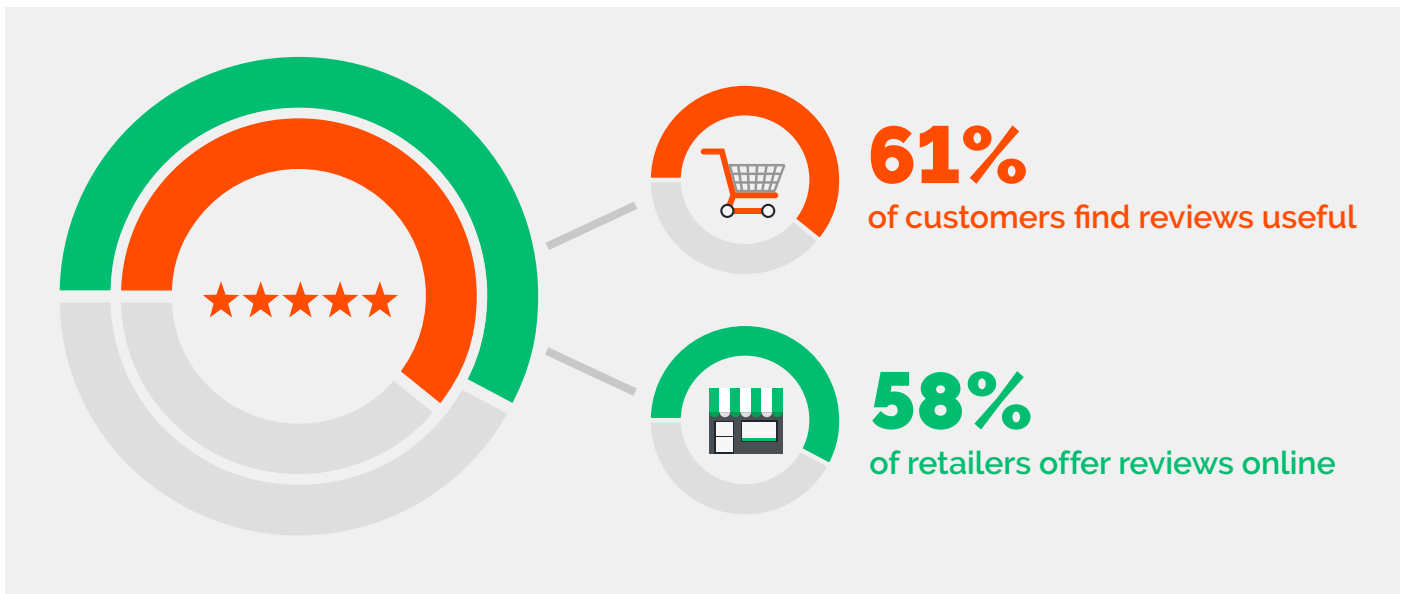
Ratings and reviews are top considerations in the purchase process, with **over half of shoppers** finding them useful, topped only by detailed product descriptions and images (70%) and shipping and returns information (62%):



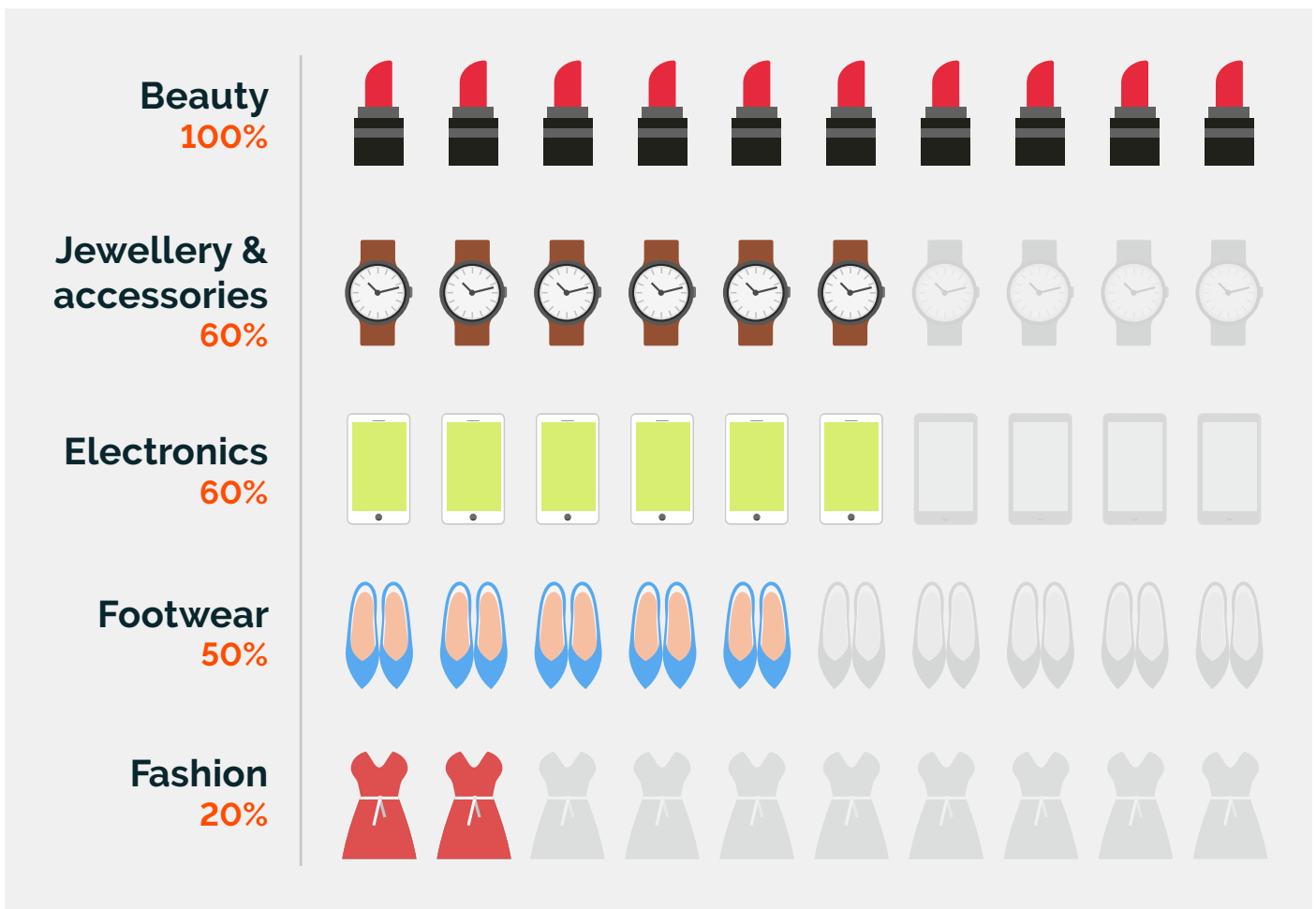
And the more reviews, the better...



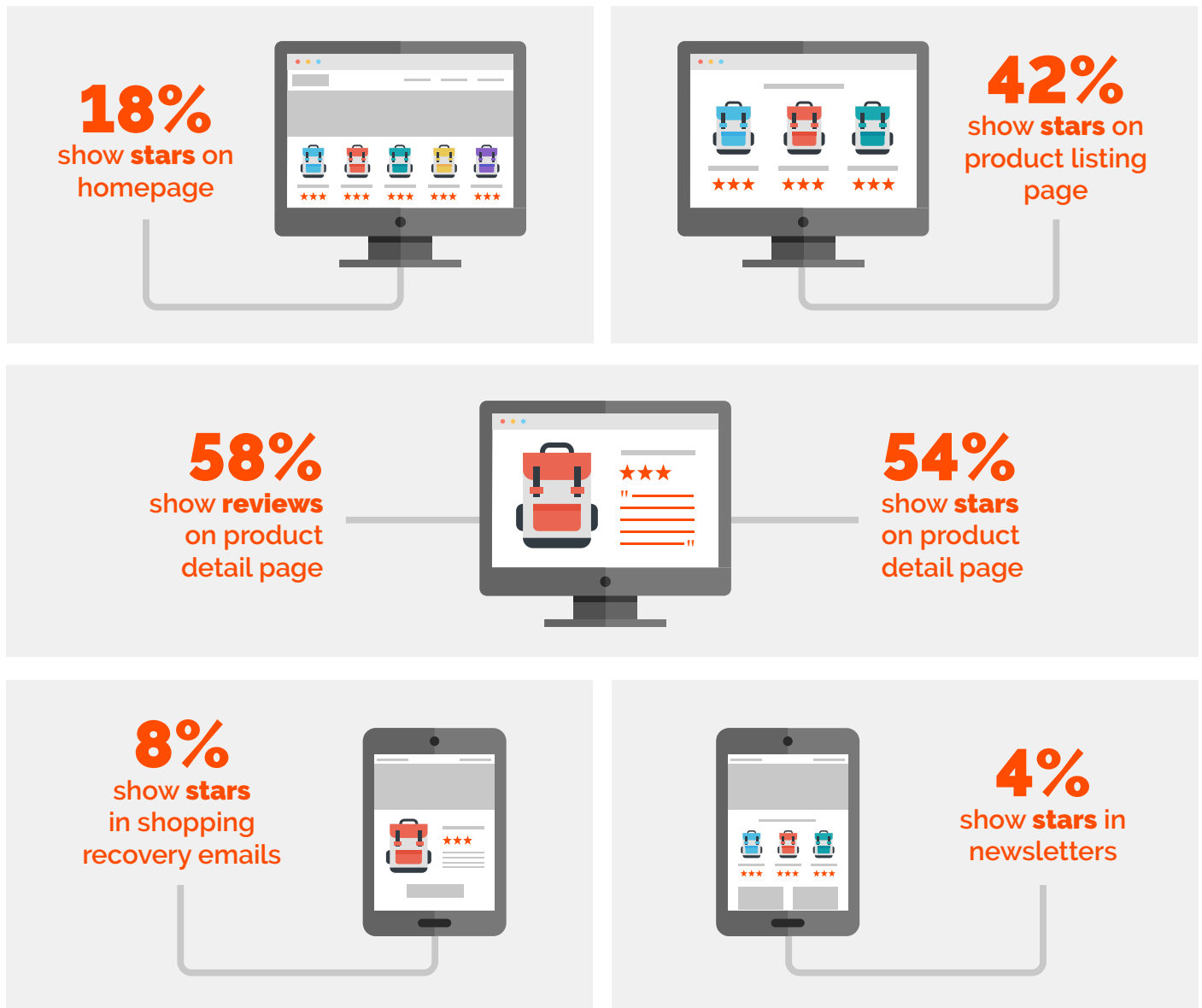
How do retailers shape up?



Retailers offering reviews in web and email content



Ratings and reviews across channels



Missed opportunities

Fashion and footwear brands could be missing out by not adopting ratings and reviews. Since customers can't touch or try on items as they can in store, customer feedback provides a valuable additional source of information to help them choose the right product - potentially reducing return rates. Reviews could also provide customer-led insights for the design of future collections.

With inboxes overflowing, brands have a limited opportunity to capture recipients' attention. Since consumers rank ratings and reviews as key parts of the decision-making process, retailers across all verticals could be leaving potential buyers behind by omitting this information from bulk and triggered emails.

Marketers can easily incorporate product feedback in emails by automatically pulling product review content from a trusted eCommerce ratings and reviews provider or in-house solution.

Retailer highlights

1 Boost conversions by emphasizing top rated products

Prominently displaying a customer favorite sparks interest by implying that it's worth looking at. Adding a rave review builds authority and trust, and shows that your brand values customers' input.

SpaceNK creates a buzz around one particular product by featuring it prominently on the homepage with a star rating and customer review:

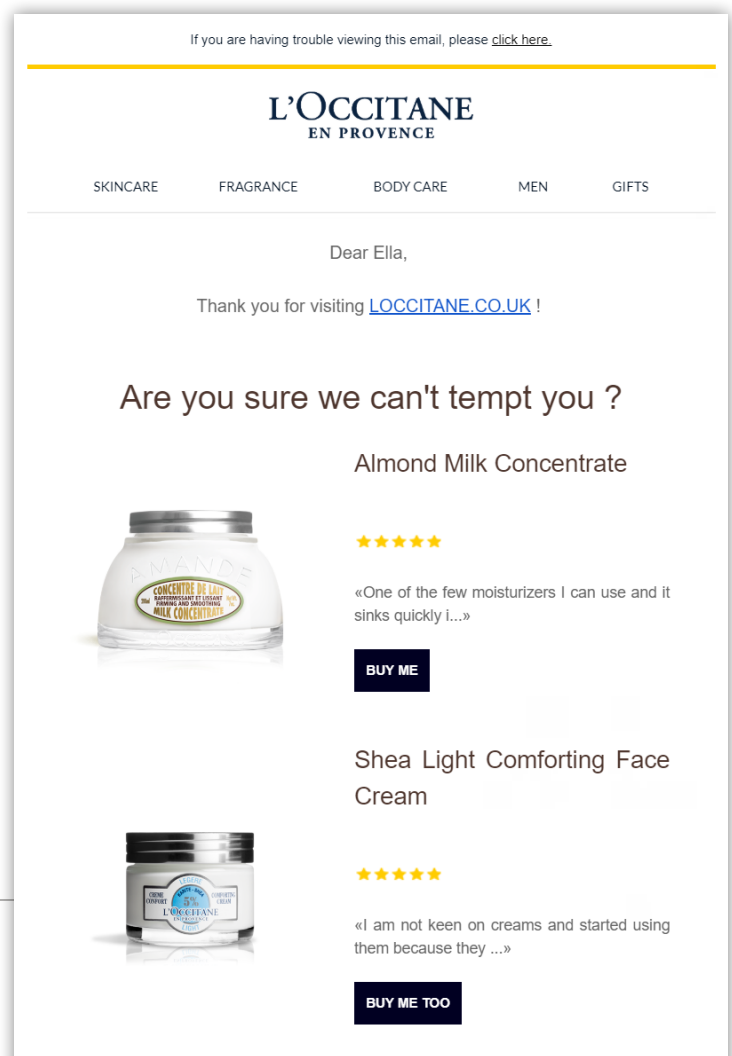


2 Tempt back shoppers with ratings and reviews in recovery emails

When sending recovery emails, retailers can give customers additional encouragement to click through by including star ratings and product reviews. For an undecided shopper, this could be the final motivation needed to make a purchase.

In this example, L'Occitane uses both stars and ratings to boost click throughs, and supplements these with product recommendations in case the browsed products don't do the trick.


The Retail Social Proof Barometer




3 Inspire shoppers with featured product reviews

Lush features selected customer reviews in a format similar to tweets on product listing pages (PLP) and product detail pages (PDP). This is particularly engaging as it presents useful information in a familiar social media format. Although the reviews have been curated and are not in real time, the tweet format creates a sense of immediacy.


Featured




SLEEPY
Body Lotion
Zzz...
£15.95/ 215g

 **katie_milne_nayru_5991971**
About 7 months ago

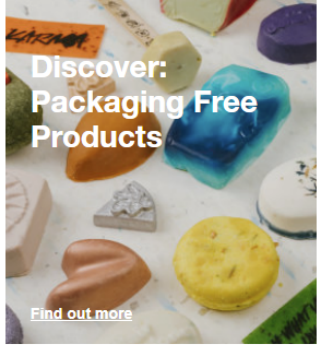
I absolutely swear by this at bedtime. I apply it on my arms and chest after I brush my teeth. Feels silky smooth and smells utterly gorgeous. Smells like bedtime now! My hubby uses it too!




SYMPATHY FOR THE SKIN
Body Lotion
Cool bananas, cool skin
£14.50/ 240g



The Grande reveal
[Find out more](#)



Discover: Packaging Free Products
[Find out more](#)



DREAM CREAM
Body Lotion
Soothe, calm and hydrate
£4.50/ 45g

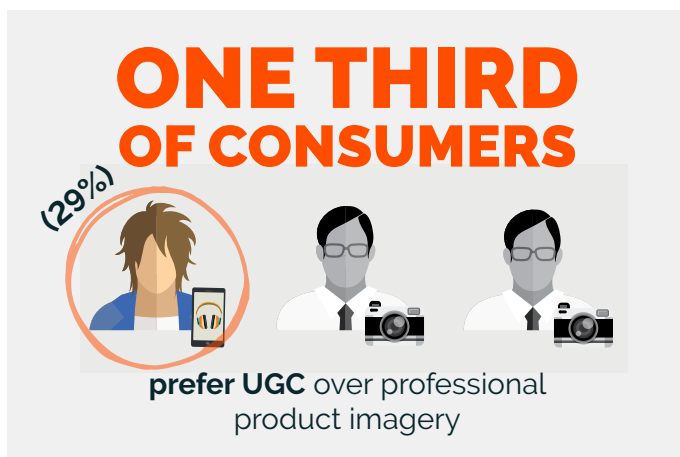
User Generated Content (UGC)

User generated content is the perfect social proof tactic for a world driven by social media. We love taking photos and sharing stories about our everyday lives. So why not leverage this to let your loyal customers become your best marketers?

What's more, customers trust posts and photos from fellow customers far more than content created by marketers.

What do consumers want?

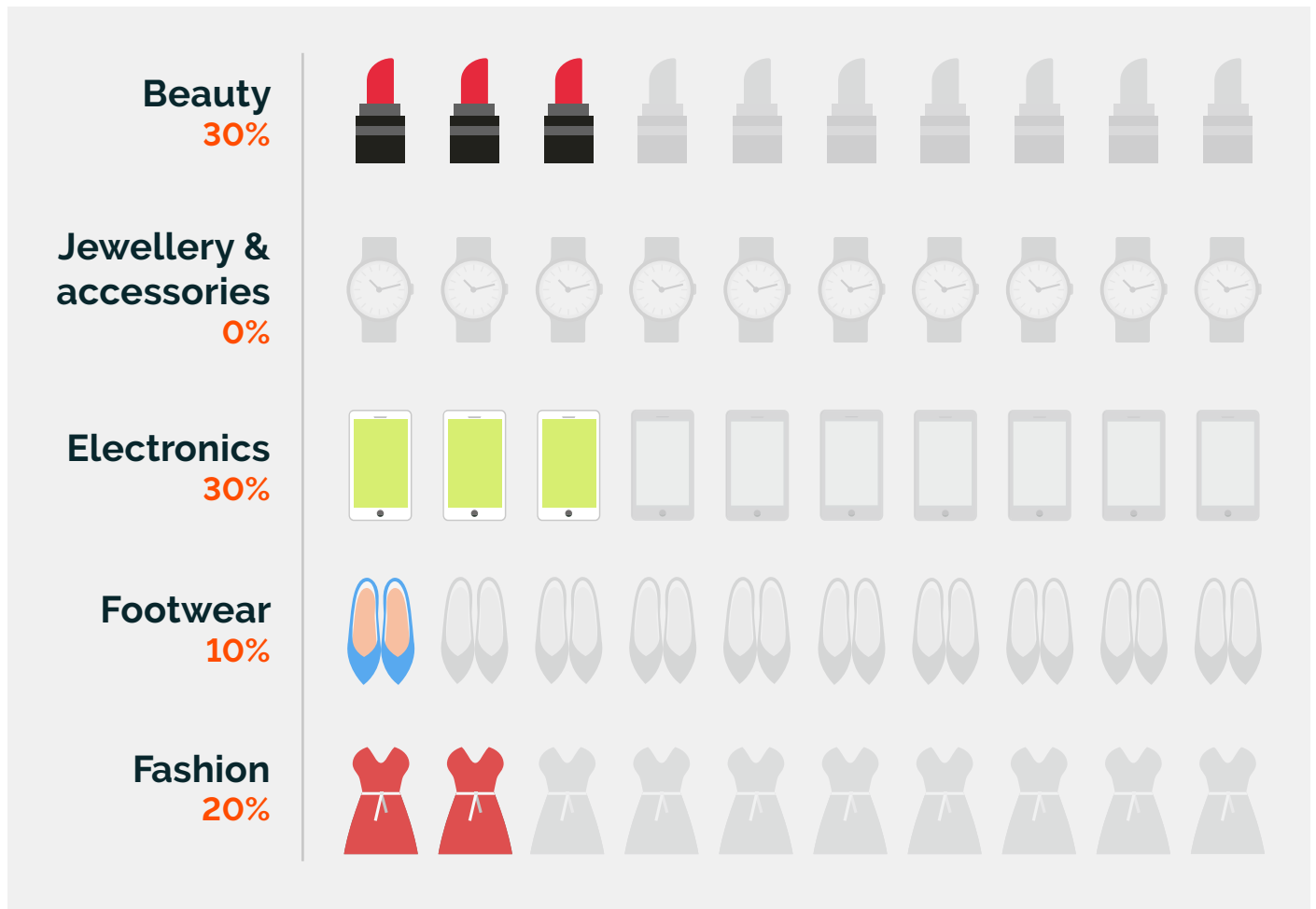
Many customers prefer to see a product worn or used by real people, rather than professional product images. But the impact of this tactic varies depending on your target audience.



How do retailers shape up?



Retailers offering UGC in web and email content



UGC across channels



Missed opportunities

Showing UGC on web pages and in emails can help build a sense of community that retailers across all sub-verticals and especially brands with a younger, image-conscious customer base - such as sneaker brands - could benefit from.

Retailers selling products that shoppers prefer to try on, like fashion, jewellery and footwear, could also boost conversions and reduce return rates by showing images of real people wearing the item on product pages.

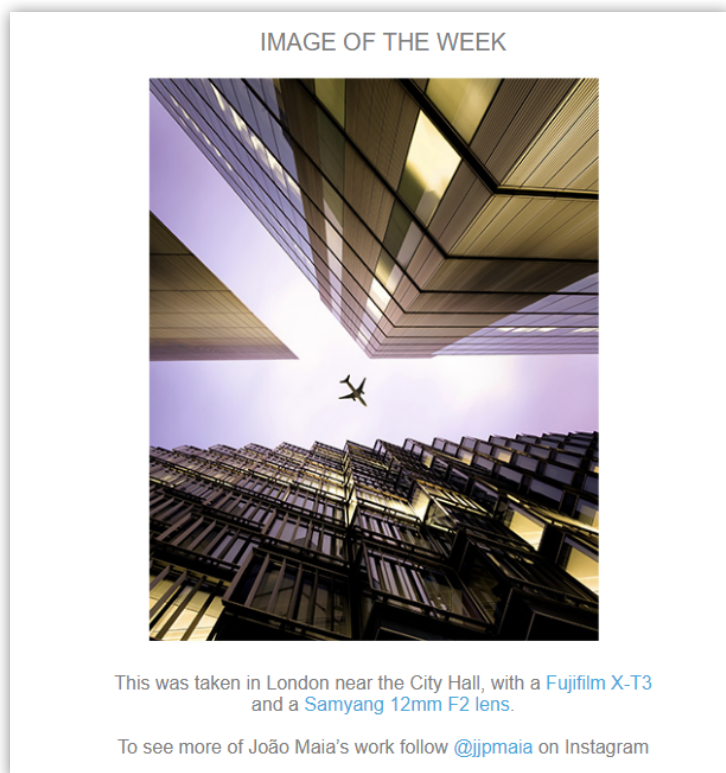
To keep the manual effort to a minimum and content fresh, real time social feeds can be incorporated to automatically pull the latest posts into web pages and emails.

Retailer highlights

1 Showcase the best customer shots

Make your customers your best marketing assets by showcasing user generated images in email newsletters, and crediting customers for their work.

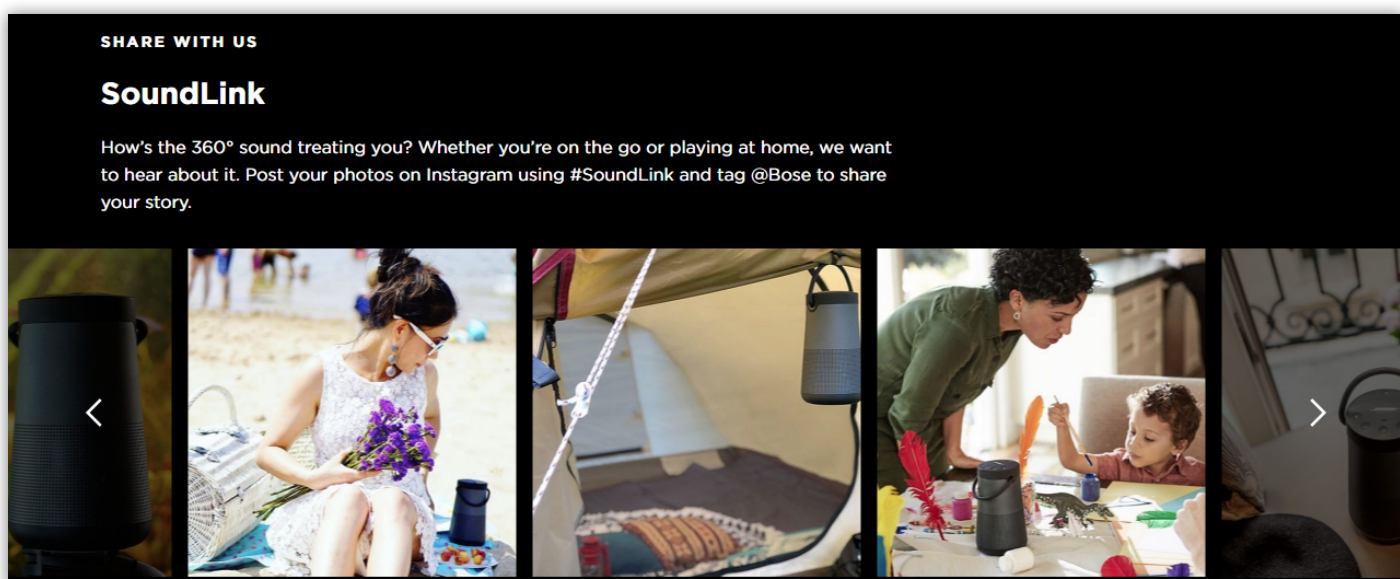
Here, Jessops includes a 'photo of the week' taken by a customer using Jessops photo products. Not only does this inspire customers with ways they can use the equipment, but it also creates a sense of community by shouting out the customer for their good work.



2 Increase engagement on product detail pages

Help customers imagine how the product will fit into their life by showing inspiring images of real people using the item.

Bose includes a social media feed alongside technical details to appeal to customers' emotions as well as giving practical information:



WISDOM OF THE CROWD



When faced with the unknown, we tend to follow the logic that a group of people collectively makes better decisions than the individual. Telling consumers what others are purchasing adds urgency and makes stock more desirable, without changing anything about the product or the price. Demonstrating that a product is popular with similar shoppers could be the crucial factor in preventing a bounce or an abandoned cart.

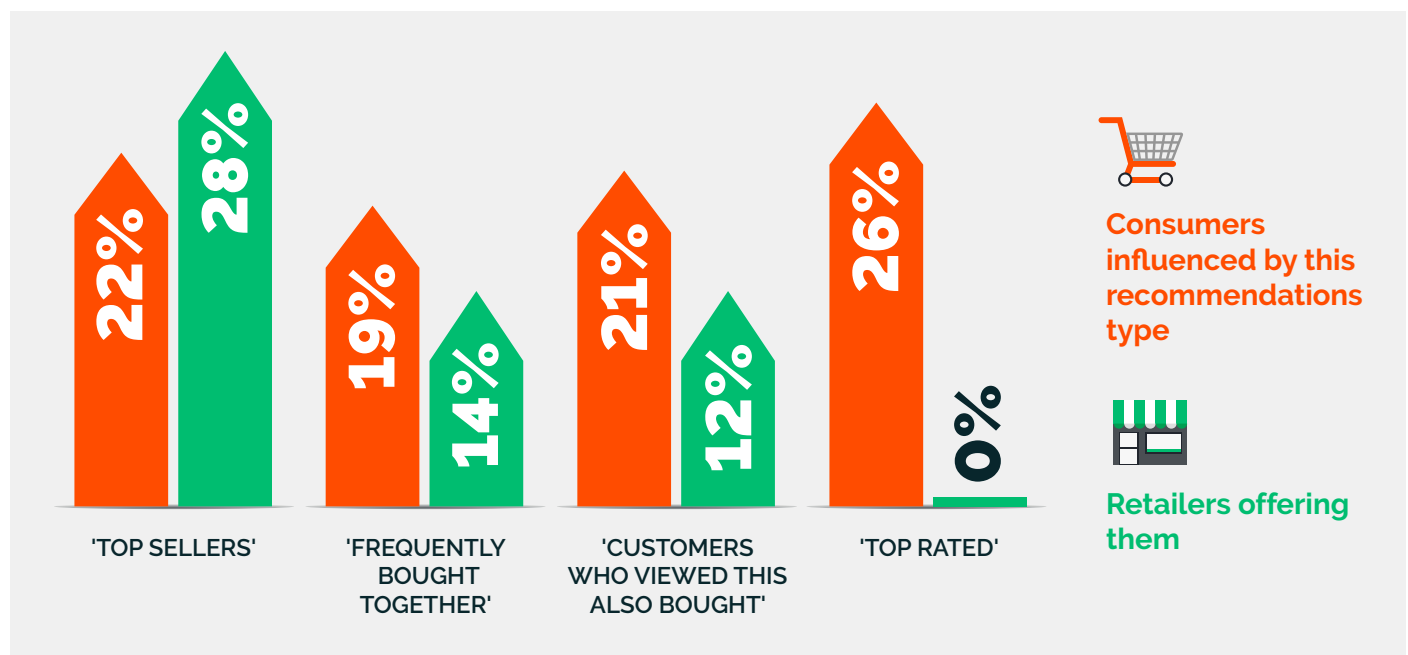
Product recommendations

Offering recommendations is a tactic as old as retail itself. In physical stores, sales clerks have been trained to help close the sale and increase the average order value by suggesting products the customer might like.

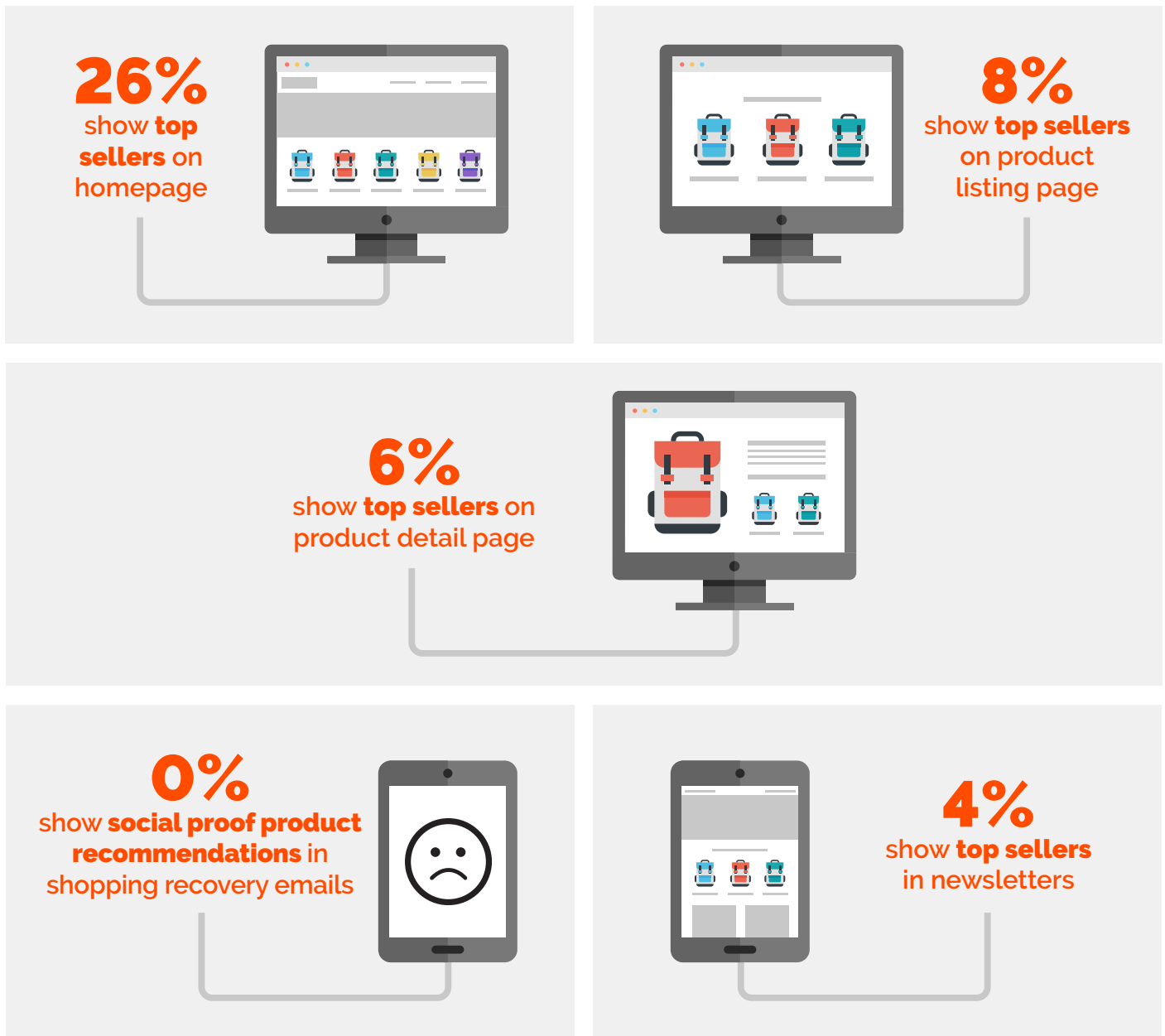
Technology now allows retailers to mimic this experience online. Using a product recommendation engine, marketers can suggest items based on a combination of crowdsourced data, business rules, and social proof. For example, retailers can highlight most-viewed or top-rated products. The effectiveness of product recommendations can be increased by filtering them based on a customer's individual preferences.

How do retailers shape up?

When consumers were asked which types of product recommendations had persuaded them to make a purchase, **more than one in four (26%)** cited **'Top-rated' products**. However, retailers are failing to capitalize on this opportunity to move customers towards a conversion.



Product recommendations by channel



Missed opportunities

Of the retailers surveyed, none were suggesting top rated products. With a quarter of consumers saying they are influenced by this type of recommendation, this is a real missed opportunity. Retailers across verticals could be using product ratings and reviews to inform product recommendations and increase conversions.

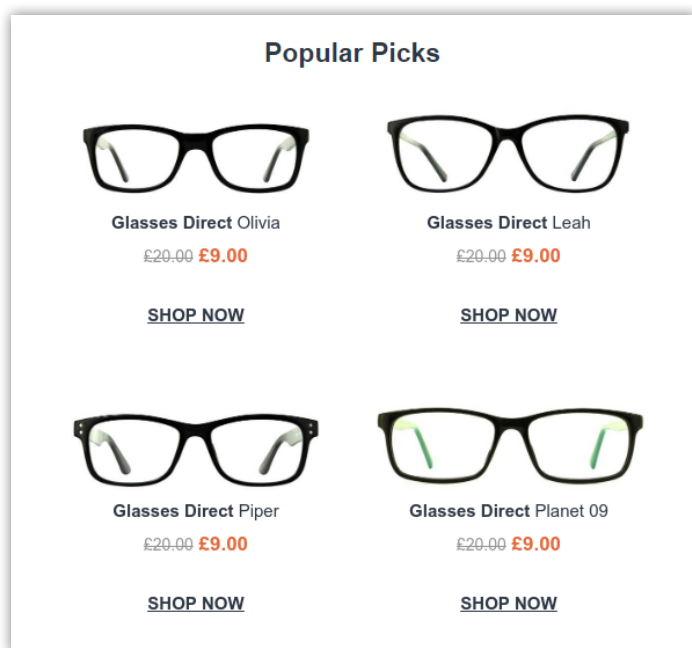
Retailers could especially benefit from including a mix of social proof product recommendations in email, where wisdom of the crowd has the power to increase click throughs and move customers towards a purchase.

Retailer highlights

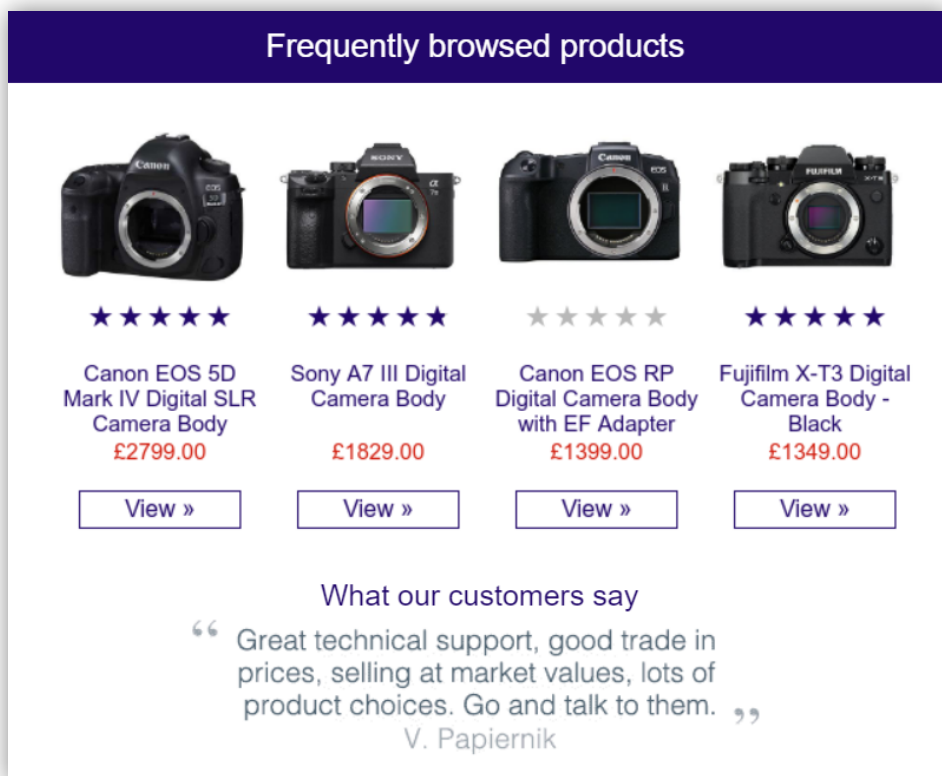
1 Use best selling products to boost bulk email performance

Bulk emails traditionally have lower KPIs than triggered emails, as there isn't one specific product that the customer has expressed an interest in. In this scenario, showing top selling products encourages customers to click through.

Here, Glasses Direct showcases popular products in its email newsletter.



2 Engage customers straight away with product recommendations in welcome emails



Recommending popular products is helpful for new customers who may not be familiar with your offering. In this example, photo retailer Wex Photo Video welcomes new subscribers by sharing recommendations for frequently browsed cameras. This is supplemented with rating stars to reassure first-time shoppers.

Popularity messaging

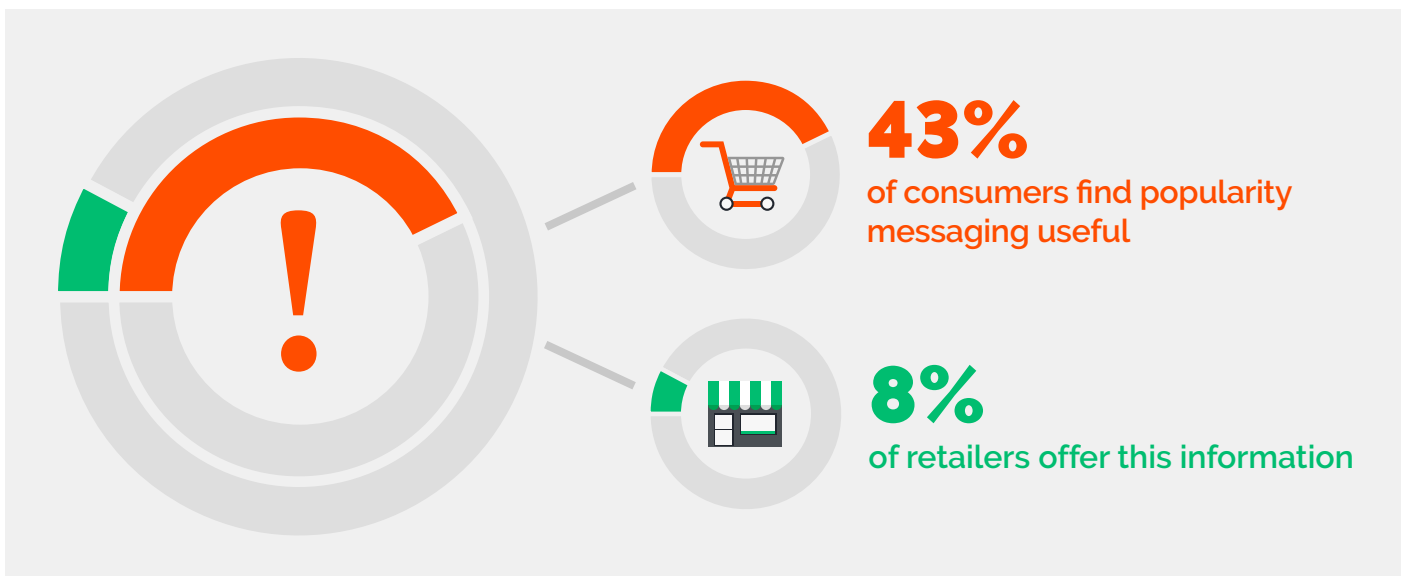
Consumers desire items more when they are popular or scarce and are driven by a phenomenon known as fear of missing out (FOMO).

This is good news for retailers. Marketers can encourage a sense of urgency by using real time product data and stock levels to demonstrate scarcity ("there aren't many left!") and popularity ("lots of people are buying this!").

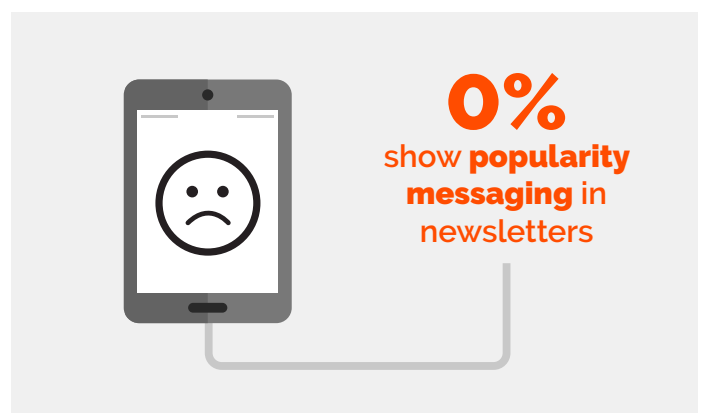
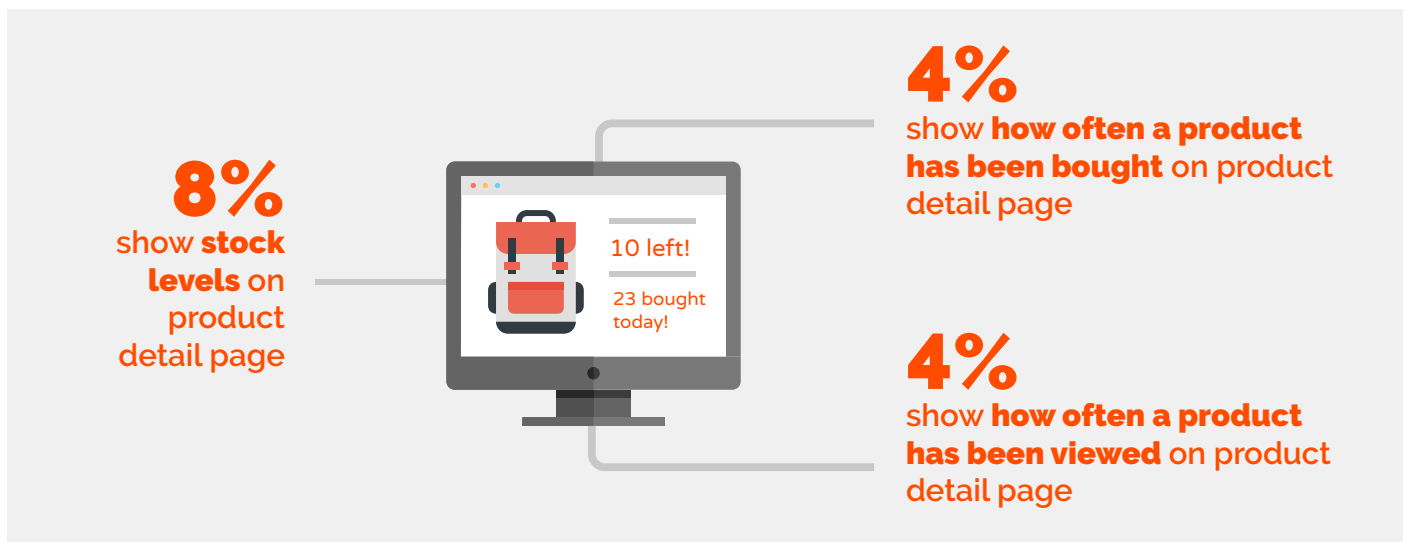
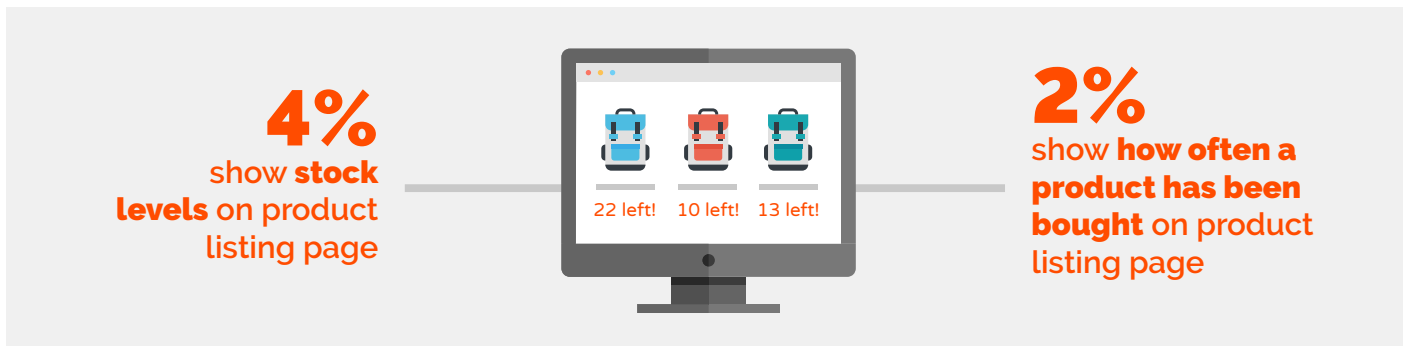
What do consumers want?

Urgency messaging has the potential to increase conversions, with **almost half (43%) of consumers** citing stock levels as a key consideration when making a purchase.

How do retailers shape up?



Popularity messaging by channel



Missed opportunities

Retailers are lagging behind customer expectations when it comes to information on remaining stock levels. Whereas almost half of consumers find it useful, very few retailers are providing this information at any stage of the purchase journey. Fast-fashion brands in particular could benefit from adopting this tactic, as customers know that the inventory sells fast and is unlikely to be restocked.

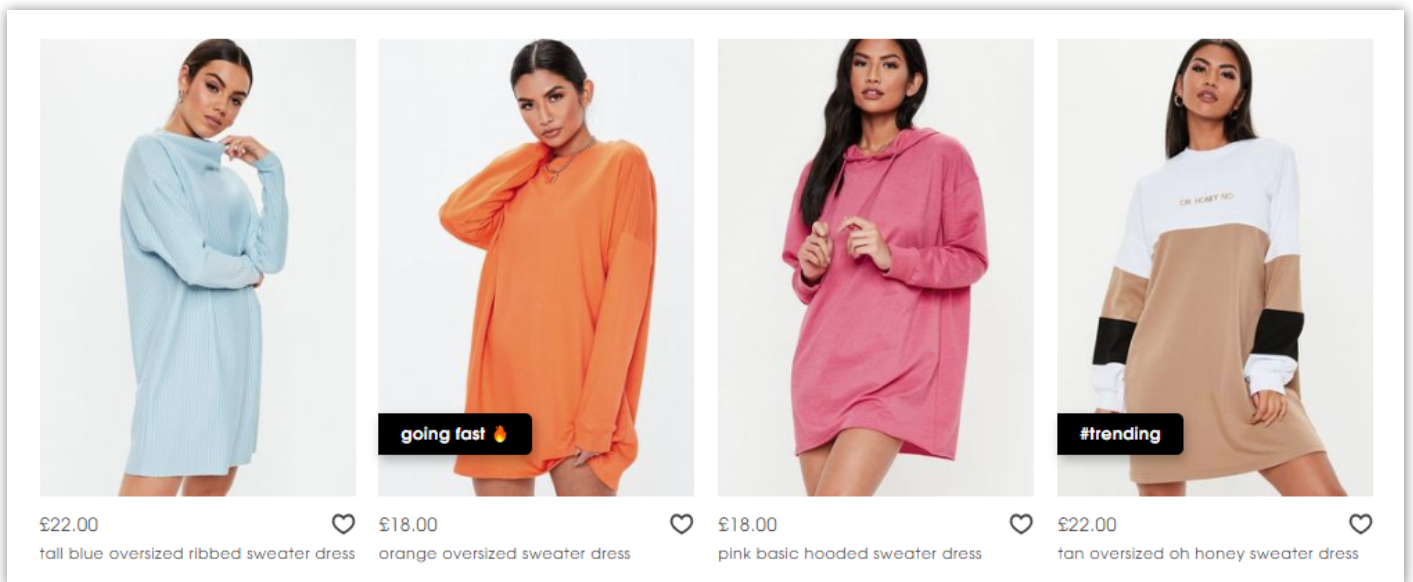
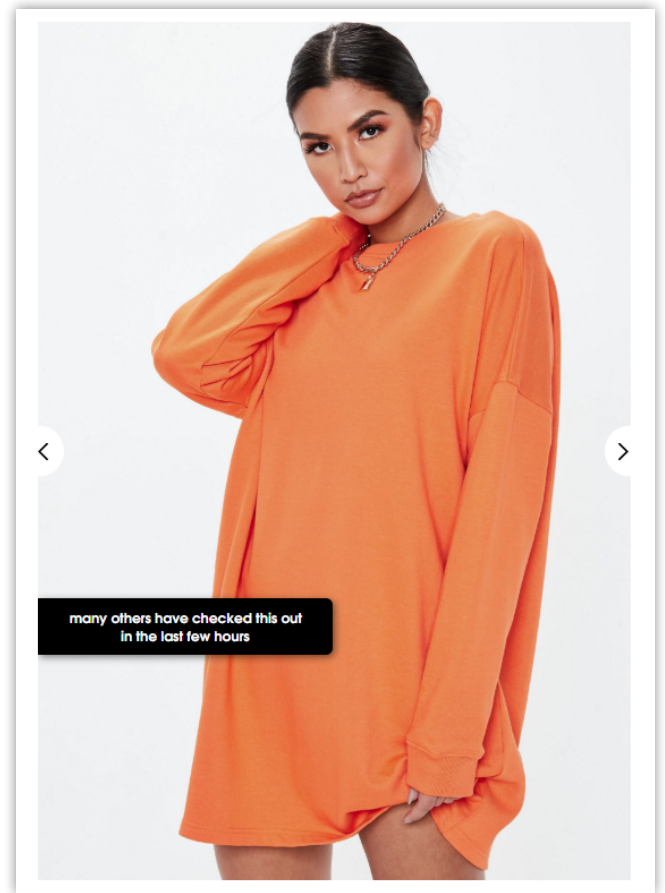
Despite consumers' interest in popularity messaging, none of the retailers were found to be using this in their newsletters or shopping recovery emails. Retailers across all verticals are missing an opportunity to drive more revenue from email marketing.

Retailer highlights



Engage your audience with urgency messaging in your brand's tone of voice

Missguided adds a touch of urgency to product listing pages by highlighting products that are selling fast. The messaging uses hashtags and emojis to appeal to the brand's younger audience. The effect is enhanced by incorporating similar messaging on product detail pages. By reinforcing the sense of urgency at each stage of the purchase journey, the website guides customers naturally towards a conversion.



CELEBRITY & INFLUENCER SOCIAL PROOF

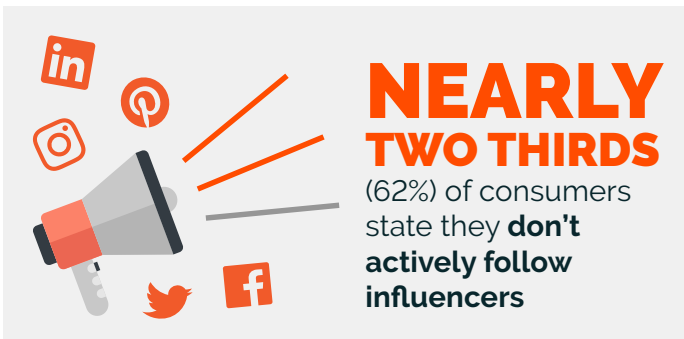


ALMOST HALF
(44%) of consumers state that they wouldn't trust any product information provided by influencers

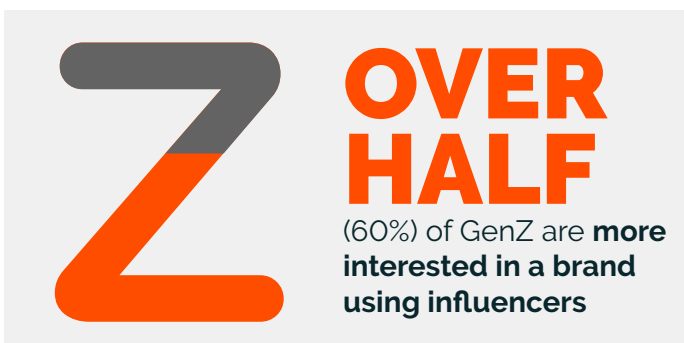
Celebrity social proof adds a sprinkle of stardust to the brand image and comes in two flavors: paid endorsements and unpaid endorsements. Either a public figure endorses your brand in exchange for a fee, or a celebrity is spotted using your product simply because they like it.

What do consumers want?

Our research has revealed that the power of influencers may be overrated, with two in three (62%) consumers being neither more nor less interested in a brand if they saw a well-known individual that they respected and liked sporting a product online or offline.



But the power of influencers varies significantly depending on the target audience, with Generation Z four times more likely than Baby Boomers to be more interested in a brand using influencers:



Generation Z are particularly receptive to influencers when it comes to how they look:

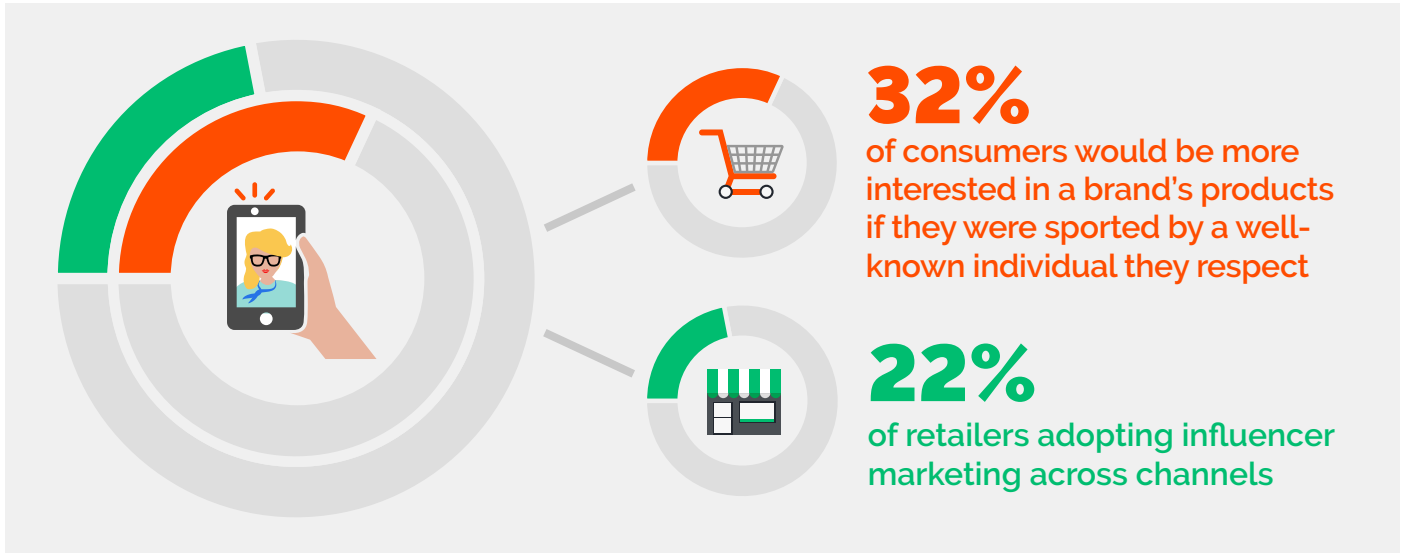


ONE IN THREE (30%)
of GenZ are actively following
beauty influencers.

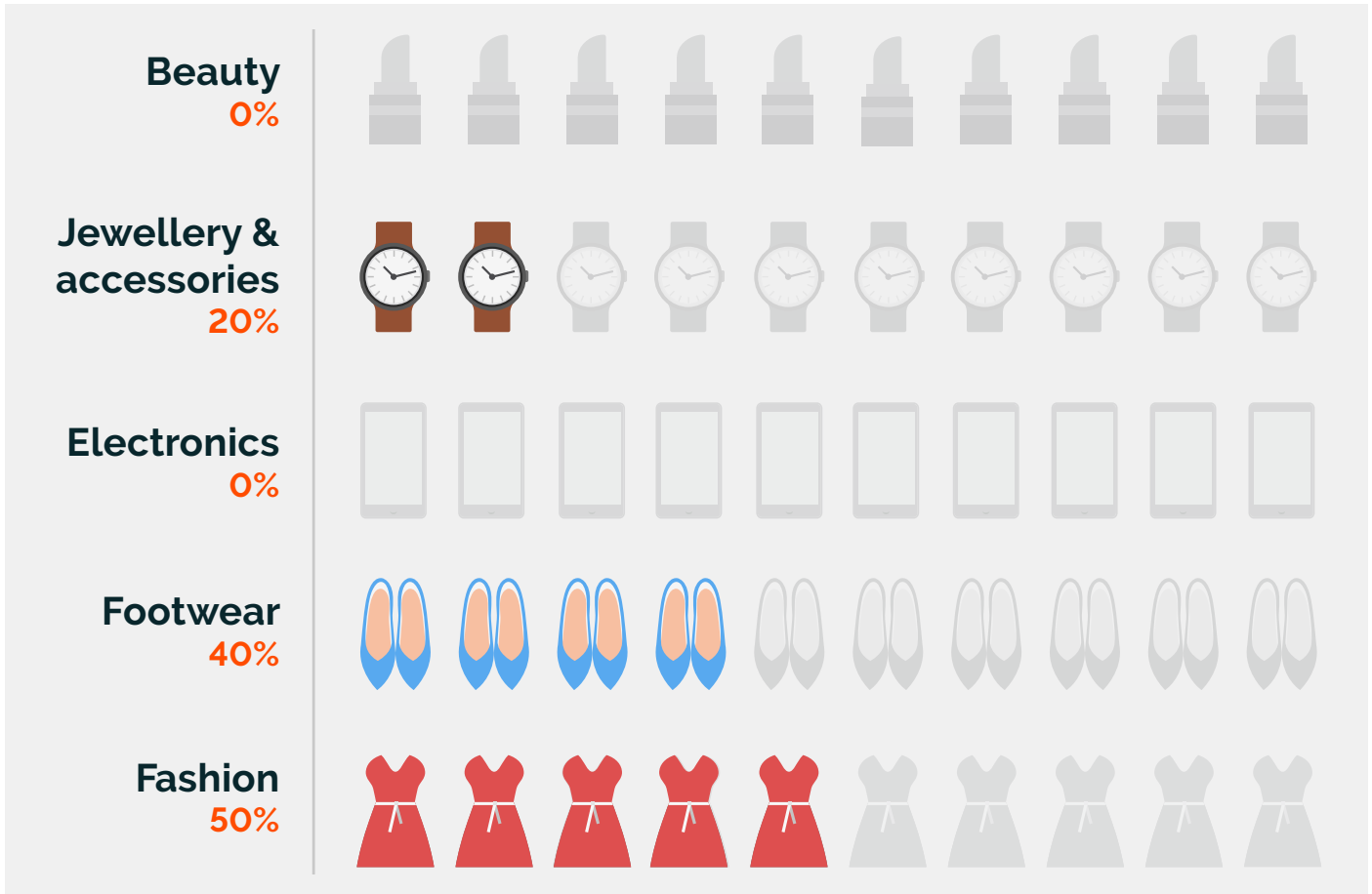


ONE IN THREE (30%)
of GenZ are actively following
fashion /accessories influencers.

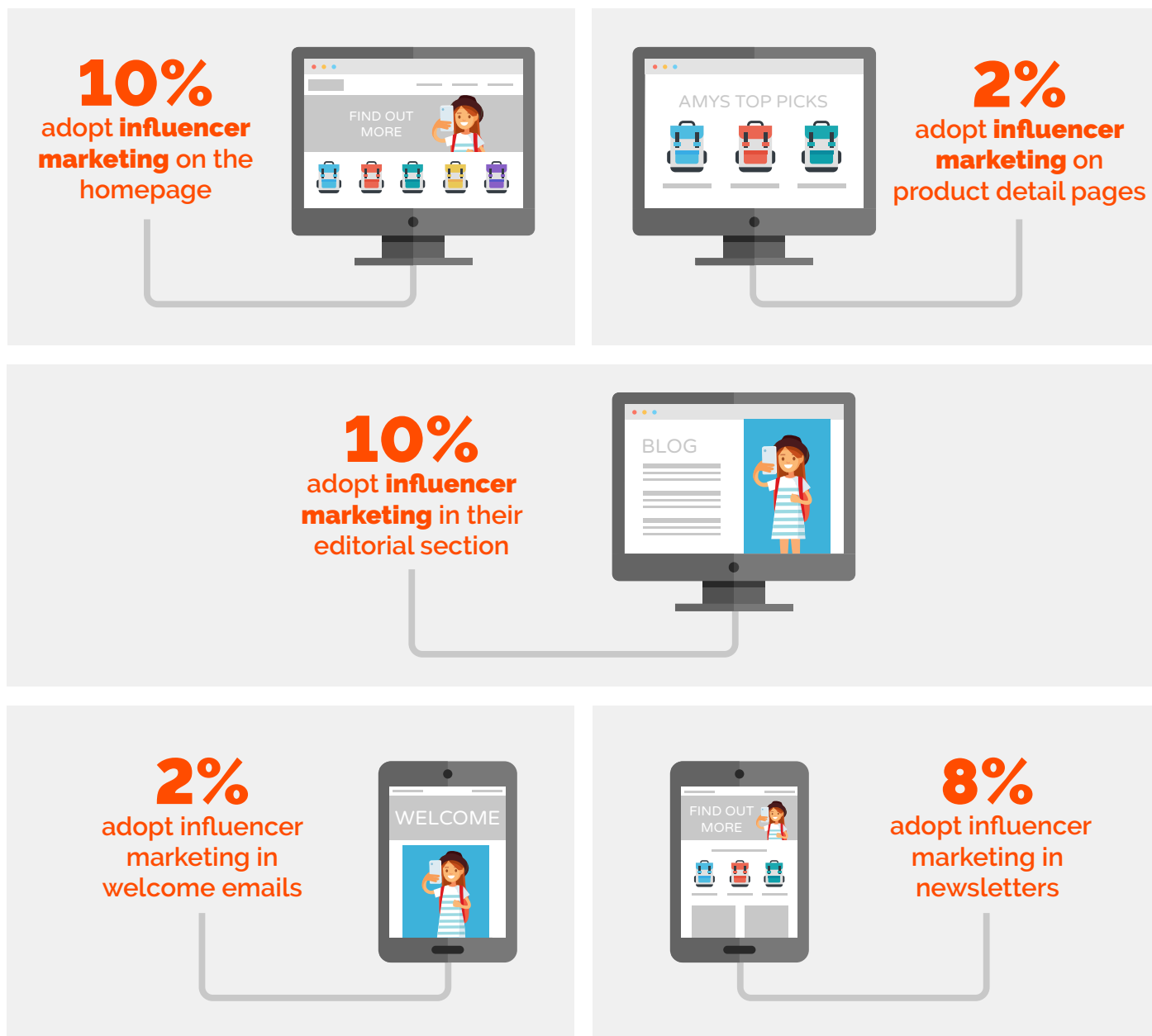
How do retailers shape up?



Retailers adopting influencer marketing in web and email content



Influencer marketing by channel



Missed opportunities

Beauty brands - particularly those with luxury offerings - are missing out on the opportunity to add a touch of glamour and prestige to their website and emails by showcasing famous fans of their products.

Retailer highlights

1 Choose celebrities who your customers admire

When adopting celebrity influencers, it's important to choose figures who align with your brand values and will resonate with your audience.



Monica Vinader uses celebrity style icons to build a story around its brand.

2 Inspire customers with hints and tips

Use influencers to show shoppers how they can get the most out of your products, such as advice on how to style certain items.

ASOS uses a dedicated team of influencers to give a human face to the brand and keep shoppers up to date with the latest trends:

as seen on
STYLE ICONS



Our award-winning jewellery is worn by Hollywood stars and British Royals alike. Our ethos, however, is very much focused on making luxury jewellery accessible to all. 'At the core of the business is the concept of inclusive luxury. All of our pieces are precious and lovingly handmade, but they're also very accessible. Our customers comfortably treat themselves to one of my necklaces or bracelets, as much as they gift their friends and loved ones.'

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

Meet the team

Follow your favourite Insider and shop their #OOTDs straight from Instagram



@ASOS_LESLEY

For major hair inspiration and real-talking beauty buys



@ASOS_LEX

Follow me for activewear style nods and Tall guy switch-ups



@ASOS_KAT

Oversized fits and minimal androgyny



KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

Top retailers

We analysed fifty retailers and scored them based on how many social proof tactics they deployed. Coming out on top were:

1 Glasses Direct

Recommended for you

Glasses Direct Olivia £20	Dunlop D141 £89
	
★★★★★	★★★★★

2 L'Occitane

Are you sure we can't tempt you ?

Almond Milk Concentrate

★★★★★

«One of the few moisturizers I can use and it sinks quickly i...»


[BUY ME](#)

3 Karen Millen

@Karen_Millen

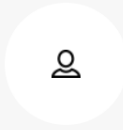
To win a £100 voucher: snap your style, tag #MyKM and mention @Karen_Millen!

[Upload to win](#)



4 The Body Shop

CHARLIE1993



Wow
★★★★★

For years I've had trouble with choosing the right shampoo. Even ones that didn't give me dandruff, after a while I have never had that problem. My hair is now incredible. I have bought in the past but totally worth it. I could...

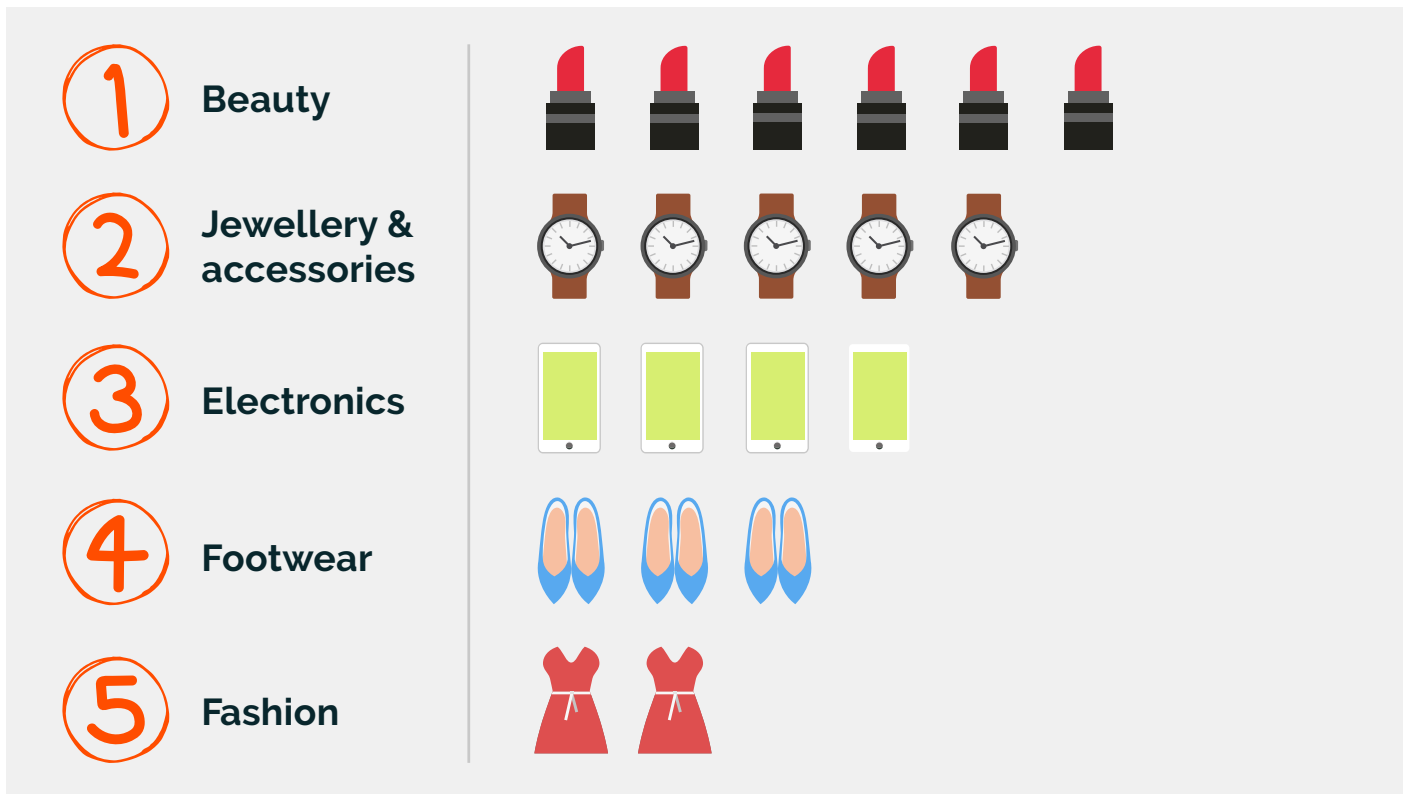
[READ MY REVIEWS](#)

Location: Kent
Gender: Female
Age: 25 - 34

Performance ★★★★★
Value ★★★★★☆
Quality ★★★★★

Top verticals

When it comes to social proof, beauty retailers lead the pack. Fashion and footwear brands have the biggest opportunity to drive more sales with social proof:



What consumers want most:

Ratings and reviews come out on top - and many retailers still have a way to go to meet customer demand, particularly in email. User generated content and stock levels have the biggest untapped potential:



ACTION POINTS FOR RETAILERS

Consumers look for and appreciate social proof when making a purchase decision.

As you might expect, more than half of customers find ratings and reviews useful when researching a product. Other information rated highly by shoppers includes product scarcity and user generated content (UGC). There is a wealth of social proof tactics available to help marketers increase conversions.

Social proof doesn't have to mean expensive celebrity endorsements – in fact, consumers place more value on scalable, easy-to-implement tactics like customer reviews. UGC is another visually appealing alternative that builds consumer trust without the need to enlist celebrities or influencers.



Retailers could be missing out by not providing live stock levels. While almost half (43%) of consumers say they are influenced by stock levels when making a purchase decision, only 8% of surveyed retailers displayed stock levels in their web or email content.

Fashion retailers have untapped social proof potential. While beauty retailers lead the pack, we found fashion brands lacking in the adoption of social proof which is surprising given that the industry is driven so much by consumer sentiments and trends.

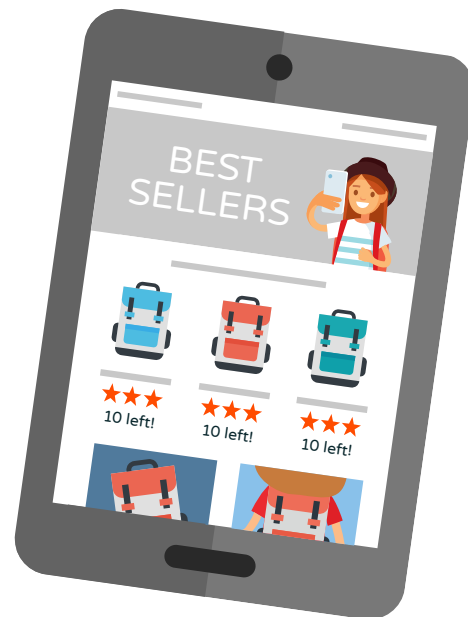


Retailers aren't even scratching the surface in emails.

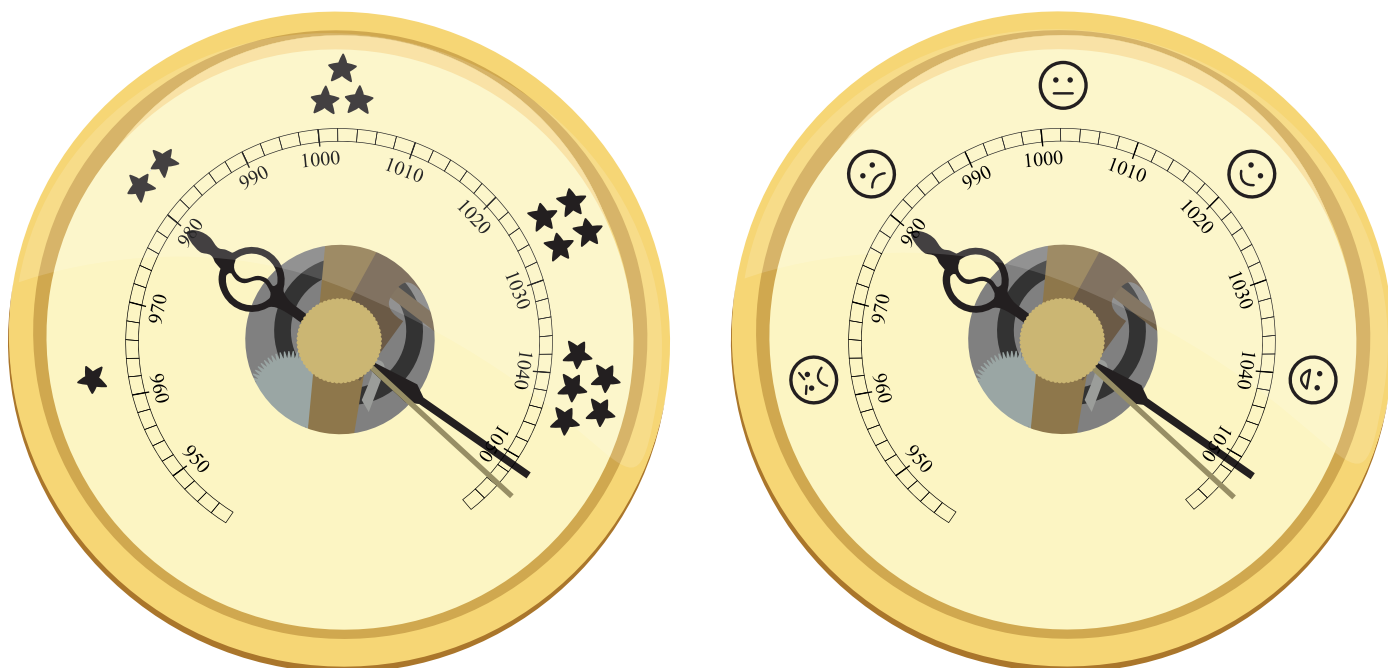
Adding rating stars to cart and browse abandonment emails increases conversion rates by up to 39%. But only 8% of surveyed retailers are using them.

Given consumers' openness to other social proof tactics, such as real time stock levels and UGC, retailers stand to benefit from adding these tactics to their email toolkit.

Adoption of social proof in email might be slow because marketers fear it would require lots of manual effort to assemble the email content. However, **marketing platforms today offer a comprehensive set of tools to automatically pull real-time social proof content into emails and web pages** - including product popularity, ratings and reviews, and social feeds.



Social proof is easily scalable and can be deployed across eCommerce websites and email campaigns. What's more, consumers have been shown to be highly receptive to them. This makes social proof a cost-effective way to increase sales across the board.



It's crucial to understand the tactics available and, above all, leverage data to identify what's going to be effective in meeting consumer expectations.

Methodology

Desk-based research was conducted between 15/12/2018 and 15/01/2019. The social proof tactics of 50 leading retailers across five sub-verticals (fashion, footwear, beauty, jewellery & accessories, electronics) were analysed across their website (homepage, product list page, product detail page, editorial section) and email marketing (welcome email, newsletter, browse and cart abandonment emails) across three key areas – wisdom of the crowd (crowdsourced product recommendations, popularity & scarcity messaging), peer social proof (ratings & reviews, UGC) and celebrity social proof (photos of a well-known personality sporting the product).

This online survey of 2000 UK adults was conducted by market research company OnePoll, in accordance with the Market Research Society's code of conduct. Data was collected between 16/01/2019 and 18/01/2019. All participants are double-opted in to take part in research and are paid an amount depending on the length and complexity of the survey. Respondents were targeted on a nationally representative basis for age, gender and region. This survey was overseen and edited by the OnePollresearch team, who are members of the MRS and have corporate membership to ESOMAR.



About Fresh Relevance

Fresh Relevance is the comprehensive personalization platform for digital marketers that drives revenue and loyalty by delivering a targeted cross-channel customer experience. Powered by real-time data, Fresh Relevance seamlessly works with the existing martech stack, unifies siloed data and tracks all customer behavior to provide unique, actionable insights into each shopper. Using machine learning, the platform helps select the most relevant tactics to guide customers along their journey across channels and devices. The platform's range of digital marketing tools is unrivalled and includes personalization, recommendations, triggered messages, dynamic contextual emails, social proof, campaign testing and reporting.



www.freshrelevance.com



hello@freshrelevance.com

SOURCES

Page 7

Website screenshot, source: spacenk.com

Email, source: L'Occitane

Page 8

Website screenshot, source: lush.co.uk

Page 12

Email, source: Jessops

Website screenshot, source: bose.co.uk

Page 15

Email, source: Glasses Direct

Email, source: Wex Photo Video

Page 18

Website screenshot, source: missguided.co.uk

Page 22

Email, source: Monica Vinader

Website screenshot, source: asos.com

Page 23

Email, source: Glasses Direct

Email, source: L'Occitane

Email, source: Karen Millen

Website screenshot, source: thebodyshop.com

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