

give them something  
good to say

# the explosion

It's a leading topic of conversation for most marketers today. It's a leading topic in much of the trade press. It's a potential growth engine for our industry. And there's good reason.

Social media is exploding.

**More than 80% of U.S. online adults use some form of social media at least once a month.**

*(Source: Forrester 8/09)*

**161.6 million people currently visit sites in social networking categories, an increase of 19% in just one year.**

*(Source: comScore Media Metrix 10/09)*

With new technologies appearing on the landscape every day, consumers' involvement with social media will continue to deepen. New channels, new tools and new ways of sharing will fuel growth and engagement.

# social opinions

It's not surprising that marketers are searching for the most effective ways to participate in the social web. While there are many different opportunities for brands in this space, our research reveals that one area in particular — **social opinions** — is having a disproportionate influence on what consumers think about a brand and what they'll ultimately choose to buy.

The peer-to-peer dialogue — taking place about all different brands — is particularly evident online, where consumers are talking in record numbers.

**“(Online) customers are talking about your brand right now whether or not you know it or like it.”**

*(Source: Forrester 7/09)*

Our opportunity lies in being at the forefront of shaping these online conversations.

It's a universal truth: People care what other people think.

Consumers have always turned to other people to ask questions, get advice and share what they know. How many times have you asked someone, "What do you think of this?" This phenomenon fueled the influence of word of mouth decades ago. And now, sharing and listening have taken on new meaning.

The online social venue has given people easy, instant connection to the opinions and experiences of people both near and far.

Think of it as **modern day word of mouth** — more accessible, more visible and more searchable.

# website as social tool

As we consider ways to leverage the social opinions being shared about our brands, the conversations undoubtedly involve Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc. Each of these is growing quickly and is influencing perceptions and intent to purchase in virtually every product and service category. And there are a lot of ways we can use these tools to monitor, respond to and influence the conversation.

But, there's another often overlooked social tool that's also influencing social opinions.

It's a tool that's within your own brand arsenal.

**It's your own website.**

# give them something

Your website is your brand's digital headquarters.

It's the foundation for your brand's presence on the web and should be viewed as critical to driving social opinions about your brand.

Now, more than ever, the experiences consumers have on websites are shaping the opinions they share with one another in social media. So a fair amount of the conversation that is happening about your brand on Facebook, Twitter and social shopping sites is being fueled by someone's **experience on your site**.

## good to say

# you control it

We think this is really good news. Unlike some other options in social media, your **website is a tool that you control**.

Since website satisfaction is linked to shaping social opinions, we will identify what drives a highly satisfying experience, which in turn could inspire someone to talk about a brand more favorably after they visit its website.

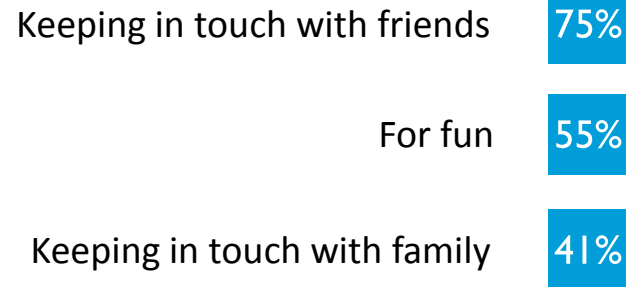
But first, as a backdrop, we will delve deeper into social opinions overall and the power they have in consumer marketing. Opinions are being shared online among like-minded consumers in both formal and informal social networking conversations.

- ▶ connections and more
- ▶ consumers trust each other (most)
- ▶ ratings matter

There is no question that people participate in social media to stay connected and have fun. So it's not surprising that consumers are deepening their involvement in the social space.

### Reasons People Join a Social Network

*(Source: Anderson Analytics 7/09)*

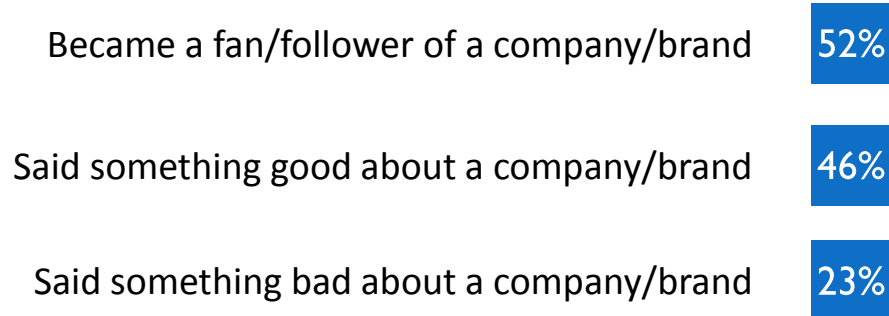


This involvement also leads to increased exposure to brands, either directly with the brand itself or indirectly through conversations with other people.

A majority of social network users include some form of involvement with a brand in their social media activities. And most of the involvement is positive.

## Site Activity Among Social Network Users

*(Source: Anderson Analytics 7/09)*



When consumers talk about brands, they're often talking to other consumers. **Peer-to-peer influence** is at an all-time high and will likely continue to be an important touch point for consumer decision making.

Recently, consumers' level of trust in their peers has increased.

### **Taking Back the Reins:**

Consumers have come to realize they can no longer rely on the institutions they used to trust. Now, they are listening to “people like me” and turning to other consumers — both people they know and people they don't — to make important decisions.

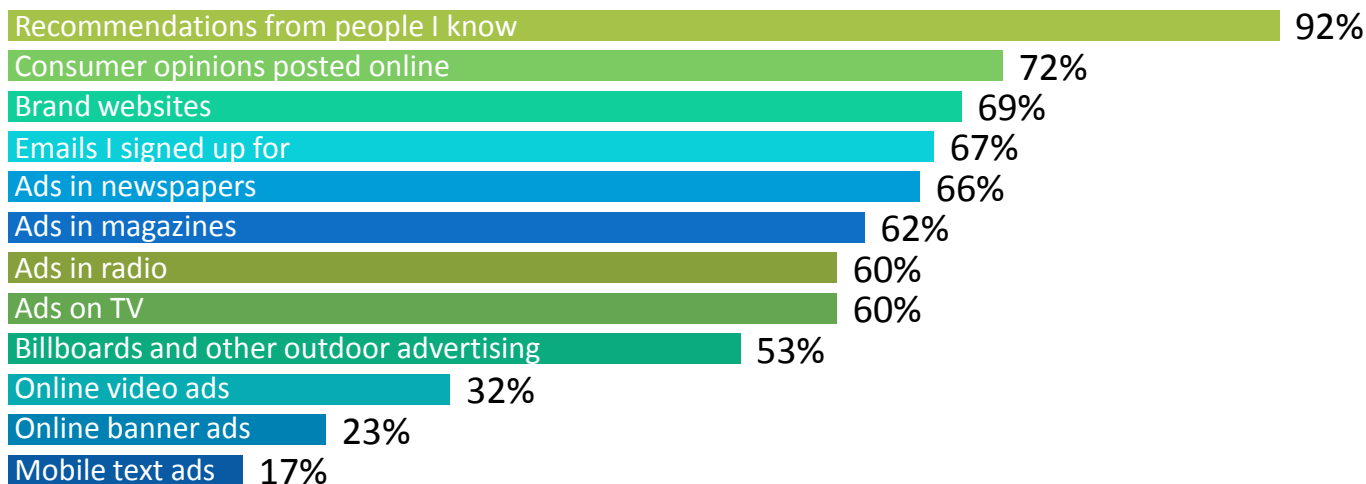
# consumers trust each other (most)

According to two independent surveys, consumers say they trust the opinions of their peers online more than marketing messages.

## Trust\*

*\*Completely/somewhat*

*(Source: 2009 Nielsen Global Online Consumer Study — Partial U.S. Data)*



## Level of Trust

*(Source: Forrester 1/10)*

- #1** Email from people you know
- #2** Consumer ratings/reviews

One of the original social tools that allows consumers to share opinions is **Ratings and Reviews**.

Today, Ratings and Reviews are no longer reserved just for books (the original ratings category), large-ticket items or products sold through e-commerce. Ratings and Reviews are now commonplace and can be found in most categories. Consumers can sort by date, relevance, highest ratings, etc., to find exactly what they want. From several independent surveys:

**84% say online customer evaluations have an influence on their decision to purchase a product or service.**

*(Source: Opinion Research Corporation 4/09)*

**81% use consumer reviews in their purchase decisions.**

*(Source: Nielsen Online 2/09)*

**Among shoppers who research products online, 77% look at ratings and reviews and 66% look for recommendations from other purchasers.**

*(Source: Jupiter 3/09)*

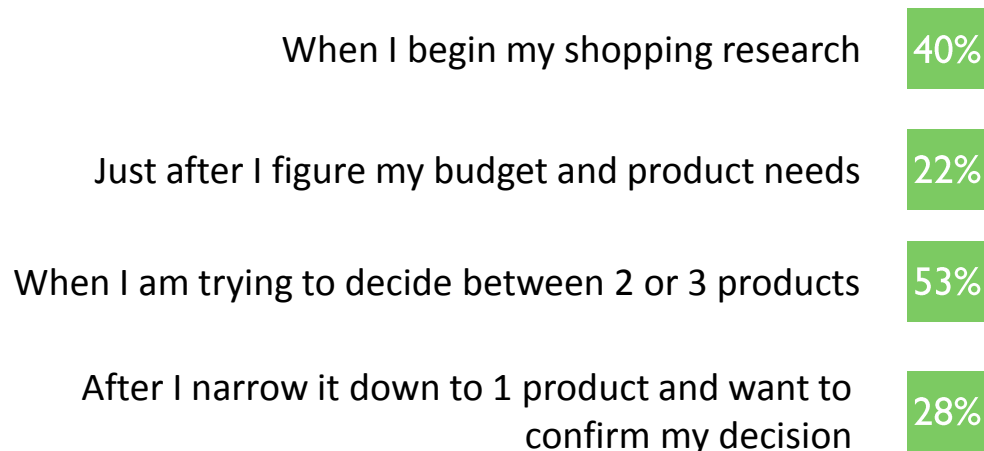
The widespread adoption of this tool can be credited in part to its integration into a variety of different sites.

- ▶ Retailer, brand and e-commerce sites, hobby and interest sites, social shopping sites, review destination sites (i.e., tripadvisor.com, yelp.com, epinions.com), editorial content/review sites (i.e., cnet.com)

Ratings and Reviews used to be someone's last check before making a purchase. Now, consumers are using the tool throughout the shopping process.

## When Typically Read Customer Reviews

*(Source: PowerReviews and the e-tailing group 2008)*



What do consumers look for in these opinions?

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**Ratings:** The bigger the number of raters, the better.

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**Reviews:** The commentary on what consumers like and don't like is helpful.

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**Recommendations:** Consumers are open to other shoppers filling the role of sales consultant, making suggestions about what is best.

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**Authenticity:** A name, a verified buyer's symbol and user profile all help consumers feel like the opinions are being shared by "someone like me."

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New technologies are making it easier for consumers to share their own opinions as well as access the opinions of others.



ShareThis®



AddThis



The use of Twitter to share product ratings is growing.



**eMarketer** “(It is) a primary destination for customer comments and complaints; consumers quickly realized that Twitter has the potential to give them a larger voice than a blog or a company feedback webpage can.”

8/09 from web

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**eMarketer** Twitter users are 2X as likely as all traditional social networkers to review or rate a product online.

9/09 from web

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While some marketers have concerns about Ratings and Reviews because of the potential for negative comments, two independent sources find that the majority of reviews are positive.

**“More than 80% of the reviews were positive and the negative reviews that did exist were generally considered helpful to consumers.”**

*(Source: Forrester 2008)*

**“80% of reviews are positive. Across 600 brands, our average rating is 4.3 out of 5. That’s across all sorts of verticals and it just continues to sustain itself.”**

*(Source: Bazaarvoice 9/09)*

In a recent study, brand and retail marketers were asked which of 10 social media platforms they expect to have the greatest impact on sales and engagement, and which ones they use today.

The study revealed that **Customer Reviews** are expected to have a much greater impact on sales and engagement than either Facebook fan pages or Twitter publishing. Yet in the same study, marketers still say they are less likely to use Customer Ratings than these other options.

	Expected to Yield Greatest Sales Increase*	Expected to Create Greatest Increase in Engagement*	Use Today
Customer reviews	100%	67%	55%
Facebook fan page	39%	42%	86%
Twitter publishing	14%	29%	65%

\*Ranked #1, #2 or #3 out of 10

(Source: e-tailing group Community and Social Media Study of brand and retailers 9/09)

All of this interest in social opinions led Trendwatching.com to name *Real-Time Reviews* as #3 on their list of “10 Crucial Consumer Trends for 2010.”

**“As more people are reviewing and contributing, the sheer mass of opinions will lead to a real-time stream of information, findable and viewable to all.”**

*(Source: trendwatching.com 12/09)*

# from digital HQ out

Clearly, the conversation about brands is happening in social media. Now let's look at the role a brand's website plays in shaping and influencing that conversation.

Forrester Research reports that the results of a better website experience are:

- ▶ **More customers will recommend you**
- ▶ **More customers will be willing to purchase**
- ▶ **More customers will resist doing business with competitors**

*(Source: Forrester 9/09)*

The goal is to ensure a satisfying website experience, which can drive positive conversations about your brand.



To further explore this topic, we partnered with ForeSee Results, the country's leader in website satisfaction and online customer satisfaction measurement. A little bit about ForeSee Results:

**With over 40 million survey responses collected to date and benchmarks across dozens of industries, ForeSee Results captures and analyzes online Voice of Customer data to quantify the relationship between a common set of satisfaction drivers, overall satisfaction with a website and future behaviors that drive financial performance.**

**ForeSee Results applies the methodology founded by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), the national leading indicator of the financial impact of customer satisfaction on the purchase of goods and services in the U.S. economy. They have proven that increased website satisfaction influences behaviors such as likelihood to recommend, purchase intent, and likelihood to return to the website and to be a loyal customer.**

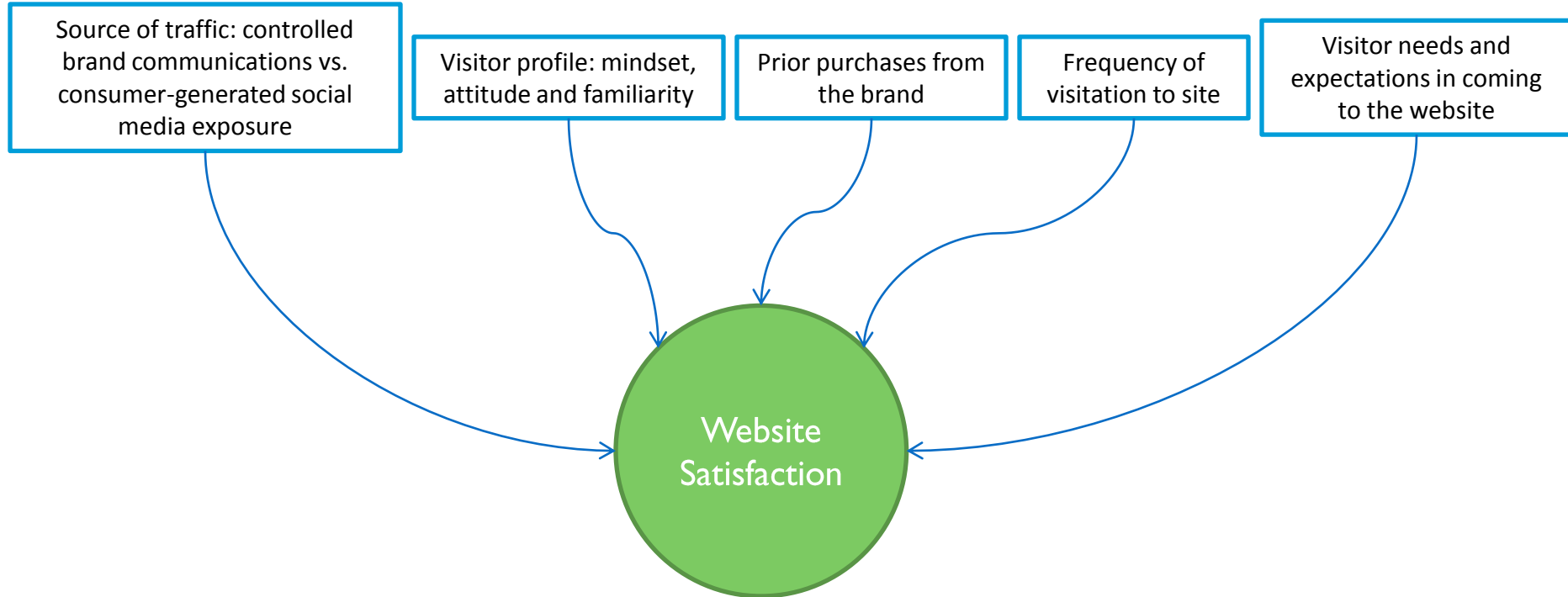


ForeSee Results shared their perspective on the key drivers of website satisfaction, including the impact that satisfaction has on someone's likelihood to recommend and/or talk about a brand with others.

There's an interesting dynamic between the **experience** a consumer has on a website, and their **likelihood to provide a positive recommendation** for that brand.

## Satisfaction Can Vary Greatly — With Many Contributing Factors

Several factors contribute to website satisfaction. ForeSee Results' research shows that every website has a distinct set of satisfaction scores and priorities.



# the connection

While many factors contribute to website satisfaction, broad themes can be observed that demonstrate the connection between website satisfaction and positive word of mouth.

Studies conducted by ForeSee Results (encompassing tens of thousands of survey responses) reveal there is a causal relationship between online website satisfaction and likelihood to recommend (or talk about )a brand, future purchase, and loyalty.

Across industries, a positive website experience can lead to positive consumer opinions and behaviors that benefit a brand.

Highly satisfied online shoppers<sup>1</sup> are:

70%

more likely to **recommend** your website

65%

more likely to purchase online

44%

more likely to purchase offline

Highly satisfied bank customers<sup>2</sup> are:

71%

more likely to **recommend** the bank overall

80%

more likely to **recommend** their bank's website

47%

more likely to purchase additional products/services

Highly satisfied visitors to non-profit<sup>3</sup> websites are:

65%

more likely to **recommend** the website

49%

more likely to **recommend** the organization

49%

more likely to donate to the organization

# 3 drivers

Driving a highly satisfying experience on your website is paramount.

Across the range of hundreds of websites measured by ForeSee Results, we see there are common priority areas for driving high website satisfaction, and ultimately, positive social opinions. There are three areas, in particular, that have historically been top drivers of website satisfaction and they continue to be top priorities today.

- ▶ **Navigation**
- ▶ **Site Search** (if applicable)
- ▶ **Brand**

# navigation

Whether a shopper is looking for a particular product or a reader is browsing for specific information, the **ability to find what they are looking for** is often the top desire. Typically, site visitors prefer to navigate to find the content they're looking for, so the navigation needs to be intuitive, with taxonomy — an organization of information and experiences — that makes sense to the visitor. Otherwise, visitors may not find what they are looking for and they may leave or turn to Site Search functionality instead.

# Doner's perspective

Navigation is undoubtedly vital to the user experience. There are several different ways in which navigation can be handled. In many instances, when people talk about navigation, or navigation *structure*, they are referring to how the content is structured on the site. One way to accomplish this is by using a tiered-navigation structure that mirrors a fixed-content road map. This is useful for flat, static sites, but it can fall short for modern, active experiences.

For more interactive sites, Doner believes that it's important to view site navigation as an active system as opposed to a more passive structure. Using a **navigation system** uncovers high-interest topics critical to user activities and popular functions, and combines them into unique scenarios that provide the basis for site design. Understanding the user needs, along with business requirements, will ultimately result in a navigation system that focuses on goal achievement, contextual story building, and a much more user-centric site experience.

# site search

Some sites will include search capabilities built into the site. Just as consumers may use common vernacular and misspellings when using the search function in a browser, they will likely do the same when using a site's search tool. If the tool **recognizes the terms**, consumers are more likely to be satisfied.

On the flip side, if the tool doesn't recognize the terminology, it will present limited or incorrect results for the search. Search is often lower-scoring in customer satisfaction surveys because the technology used is not flexible and relevant enough for visitors. Customer satisfaction analytics can help identify what visitors — both those satisfied and dissatisfied — were searching for, and link to keyword data and replay how they went about their searches.

# Doner's perspective

Search is critical. Many customers use search as their primary form of navigation. Therefore, special attention must be paid to how information on a site is classified. A **well-designed search results page** will help visitors easily find what they need and encourage them to continue using the site.

Another important factor is that search often begins off-site at a major search engine. Therefore, **search engine optimization** of the site content is a crucial element of site design, as it has potential to drive traffic to the site initially.

# brand

While one of the top benefits of a website is to build relationships with visitors, website satisfaction studies show that many websites fall short in conveying the distinctive qualities of the brand. This is a twofold opportunity.

In some cases, a brand's website will be the first stop in a consumer's online navigation. In this case, your branding can **deliver the messages and impressions you want.**

On the other hand, for those consumers who first interact with your brand online in the broader social media space, the dialogue on those sites will start to create an impression. In this second case, by the time a consumer gets to your site, it's critical that your website delivers the message and impressions that you believe **distinguishes your brand and will create greater engagement.**

# Doner's perspective

From the design of your product or service to the way a customer service representative is empowered to resolve a customer issue, every interaction a consumer has with your company should be carefully designed to deliver an **authentic and positive brand experience**. Your digital headquarters is no different. The user experience it conveys needs to be unique to your brand, in terms of both its content and function.

# price ≠ satisfaction

Though price often garners a low satisfaction score, improving this dimension on a website is generally not a high priority. Whether you offer e-commerce on your website or publish pricing for products and services purchased elsewhere, price is likely to be one of the lowest scoring elements among website visitors. It is human nature for consumers to rate satisfaction with price lower than other elements, even when they see value in the products and services being offered.

So while it may be helpful to understand whether price is a high-priority driver of satisfaction for your website and your visitors, the body of existing research suggests that enhancing this dimension rarely has the same impact as enhancing the three key drivers.

# influence the conversation

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As the social media conversation grows — and social opinions continue to influence brand and buying decisions — remember that you can give consumers something good to say **right from your digital headquarters.**

# 4 things to consider

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# 1. monitor what's being said

As is often said, knowledge is power. Monitoring the “buzz” about your brand in the social media space will keep you “in the know.” Whether through a formal monitoring system or an informal process, identifying what consumers are saying and where they’re saying it is important. Learning can help:

- ▶ Bring to the forefront both positive and negative commentary
- ▶ Assess the volume of comments overall, by time period and by channel
- ▶ Uncover things about your products and services that you may not know
- ▶ Serve as a proactive means of responding to consumers if problems do come up

## 2. embrace/share ratings & reviews

Consumers are making more purchase decisions based on ratings and reviews. Continue to study how your brand is rated. Keep a record of where the ratings are, what ratings you receive and the reviews that consumers are ascribing to your products and services. You can also:

- ▶ Encourage consumers to rate/review your product once they've purchased
- ▶ Share ratings/reviews with other consumers in outbound communications
- ▶ Provide links and easy access to positive reviews that you receive
- ▶ Decide that you may want to take some action based on reviews

# 3. delight them at your digital HQ

Research proves that high satisfaction with your website can lead consumers to share positive opinions about your brand. Ensure that your website is delivering an excellent brand experience throughout , specifically in common key satisfaction driver areas:

- ▶ Navigation
- ▶ Site Search (if applicable)
- ▶ Brand Differentiation and Engagement

# 4. measure to better manage

Given the importance of creating highly satisfied experiences online, measuring key drivers and visitor satisfaction with your website should be considered. Using ForeSee Results' proven method, you can:

- ▶ **Measure what matters** — attitudes that directly influence whether someone will recommend your brand, return to your website, purchase and be loyal
- ▶ **Use customer satisfaction analytics that link to financial results** — quantify the relative impact of improving satisfaction on key drivers
- ▶ **Focus analysis on visitor segments of greatest value to your organization** — in terms of visit intent and criteria that enable you to identify high-value customers
- ▶ **Prioritize investment where it will have the greatest impact on satisfaction and behavior** — don't just respond to the "squeaky wheel" since those who are most vocal about complaints may not be your best customers

[www.donerus.com](http://www.donerus.com)

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