



POWER[♥] OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE



IDEA GENERATOR

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Introduction

A social influencer is someone that is a leader or influencer in a niche. They have many followers and people who listen to what they have to say. They are trusted and are on top of trends – even spotting a new trend before anyone else does. When a social influencer acknowledges and recommends you, people notice you.

In business, people want to see 'social proof' that you know what you are doing, that your products and programs work and because you have so many people in your 'circle' sharing great testimonies and results they achieve because of you. It's like having a stamp of approval.

This is one of the many strategies and techniques that marketers rely on to win you over and convince you that their product is worth your hard-earned cash. It taps into a basic human characteristic – the need to be like others. In our desire to conform, we often succumb and buy whatever marketers have to offer.

Social proof is really just a modern name given to something that has existed since humans formed their first communities in the distant past. Having social proof is more than a marketer's attempt to persuade you to buy. It's a part of everything we do.

Think of an article that's gone viral on social media. More and more of your friends are sharing it every day. Don't you start wanting to read it and see what it's all about?

You're buying something on Amazon and you see that one seller has a 97% customer rating while another has yet to make a sale. Which would you choose?

While you're walking down the street, you see that nearly everyone else on the street is peering around the corner. Wouldn't you quicken your step and curiously look to see what's going on?

Social proof is ubiquitous and its part of everyone's life. It's a keystone of any marketing strategy and it's a technique you should be incorporating in your plans.

It's important for businesses not only because it's powerful, but also because it builds trust. When people are looking for a product or service, they are thinking to themselves, "How is this product or service going to help me." There's also a negative side to their thinking. They're saying to themselves, "Can I trust this business?" or "Is this product or service going to fall short of my expectations and let me down?"

Social proof is in the form of reviews, testimonials, or statistics on customer satisfaction tells the prospective customer that this is a company they can trust. The product or service may or may not be perfect, but at the very least, the company has a great deal of customer satisfaction, so it can't be all bad.

Social Influence and Social Media

Social influence is an important factor in driving people to make a purchase, sign up for something, visit a website, or take any other kind of action. It's even more important today because we rely so much on social media. As social media use grows and people increasingly make major decisions using social media, the importance of social influence rises as well.

On a company's website, you can see what the company says about itself. Naturally, the company won't say anything negative. We all know that a company's own marketing materials are designed to influence you to buy. But on social media, it's a completely different story.

When you see people talking about a company on social media, you're hearing the voice of a business's customers, and not the business itself. In the minds of a prospective customer who is at the stage of kicking tires, what other customers say is extremely persuasive.

Are YOU Missing Out?

There's a negative side to social proof as well. Social proof offers a sense of urgency. This is not the kind of urgency that's used when you see an ad saying, "Buy now while supplies last." Rather, it's the *feeling* that you might be missing out. What if everybody else does it, and you don't?

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Think about a party, club event, or other social event on a Friday night. You've decided to skip it, but then you realize that all of your friends are going. Your friends are all having a good time and sharing an experience and you're missing out. Sometimes, social influence can work in this way.

The What and How of Social Proof

One of the most famous examples of social proof is offered by McDonalds' time-worn advertising: "247 billion served." This tells us that a massive number of people have eaten here, so it must be pretty good. This type of social proof relies on the sheer power of numbers. These people aren't necessarily your friends, experts you know, professionals, or anybody else in particular.

Circle of Friends

A similar source of social proof is your own circle of friends. Rather than being the same type of person or a person who took the same action as you, this method utilizes your friends. For example, when you look at a website and it shows which of your Facebook friends liked or visited the site as well, this boosts the site's credibility in your eyes. This type of proof is enabled by social media.

Users and Clients/Customers

One of the most common sources of social influence is past users and customers. This is what you often see with testimonials and reviews. The word of a former customer who has actually purchased and used the product is very influential. It's like a personal reference. You can hear about the past user's experience actually using the product, which gives you information about the product while also boosting its appeal in your eyes.

Experts and Niche Leaders

Using an expert is a great way to build trust. An expert isn't just a friend or past user, but someone who really knows the field well. Their judgment on a certain product or service carries much more weight than that of an ordinary person. The fact that an expert would endorse a product at the risk of jeopardizing their reputation lends a great deal of credibility.

How to Effectively Use Social Influence

It's not enough to simply show others endorsing a product or service of yours. Your social proof should have a clear aim. It should spotlight some aspect of your offering and, in particular, how it has produced results for those who have used it.

Social influence is often used to show a benefit that's the result of using the product. For example, a product may save you money, save you time, bring your family closer together, and so on. The best way to demonstrate this is to make the results as specific as possible. Tell the customer something like, "By using this product, you'll save \$XX on your insurance payments." The more specific, the better.

What key types of social proof you can use in your own marketing:

Make a list of different authorities, or user types who you could tap for social proof:

Obtaining Social Proof from Your Customers

- Put yourself in your customer's shoes
- Figure out what is relevant and meaningful to them
- Take into account where they are in your sales funnel

Social Proof Through Testimonials

One of the most common formats for social influence is the testimonial. Testimonials can be from first-time customers who have just experienced the benefit of your product for the first time, or they can be from loyal long-term customers.

There are many ways to obtain customer testimonials through regular communications with your customer.

When asking for testimonials, make it as little work as possible for the customer. If they have to write in a certain format or provide a great deal of information, this is a barrier that may make it harder for them to provide their testimonial.

You may also choose to offer an incentive for testimonials. This is a little bit like bribing, but what you're really doing is encouraging the customer to say what they already feel and giving them a little nudge toward doing so. Your incentive could be something non-monetary, like access to exclusive content or a free membership.

Beyond the Testimonials: More Tactics for Using Social Influence

Typically, a case study is a story that tells how a person used your product or service. It demonstrates to the reader how they can use the product or service as well. With case studies, it's better to have one or a few long, very well-written stories than many that are not as detailed. You should focus on

quality rather than quantity; a good and well-placed case study can provide a great deal of social proof.

The best-case studies are highly visual. You should include images of the customer using the product or service. Even better, make a video for case studies. The best-case studies also have data to support the story they tell. It's much better to say "I gained 10,000 more email subscribers" or "She increased her sales by 100%" than something general like, "My email subscribers grew." The specific facts help to create a clearer image in the reader's mind of the results they can get from the product or service.

The story in your case study should answer the questions that are in the reader's mind.

Online Reviews

Online reviews are an especially powerful form of social media because, like any other type of user-generated content, they offer the voice of the customer, not the company. People increasingly rely on online reviews in making purchase decisions.

You can use third party online review sites like Yelp, or you can allow customers to leave reviews directly on your website. Reviews offer excellent website content and can also help with SEO because websites with fresh content get more traffic from search engines.

Don't be afraid of negative reviews. It's a given that if you allow users to write reviews, some may say something you don't want to publish. However, you can address negative reviews (as mentioned above) and one more advantage to having a few negative reviews is that they lend more credibility. If all reviews are glowingly positive, this may be suspicious.

Add Social Proof Continuously

- Include testimonials in newsletters or blogs
- Tweet user stats

- Include statistical info in your newsletter
- Work social media into webinars and podcasts

Reminders

- Social proof works better with pictures
- People are influenced by similar people
- Experts create positive associations
- Stories connect deeply

Identify methods for gaining status of social proof on an ongoing basis

Solicit testimonials

Identify 5 ways that social influence will help grow your customer base and credibility

Identify 3 types of social proof you are not using currently that you will implement

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Create an ongoing social influence system.