



# Buy It, Try It, Rate It

Study of Consumer Electronics  
Purchase Decisions  
In the Engagement Era



KRC RESEARCH

# The definition of “product review” has changed.

Increasingly, consumers are making their electronics buying decisions based not only on the opinions of technology journalists, but on fellow consumers’ real-world, long-term experiences. Product opinion is now all around us — but how are consumers using it and what do marketers need to know about engagement in this new world order?

Weber Shandwick partnered with KRC Research to conduct Buy It, Try It, Rate It, an online survey conducted in September 2012 of 2,004 American adults who’d recently made one or more purchases of consumer electronics (CE) products like smartphones, tablets, cameras or TVs. This study delves into how they’re using reviews to make their buying decisions in an era where another consumer’s voice can be heard as loudly as an expert journalist’s.

One resounding conclusion from our study that CE companies can’t afford to ignore: *reviews drive sales*. Reviews are used for more than consultation — they impact purchases. Approximately two-thirds of

consumers (65%) have been inspired enough by a favorable consumer review to buy a CE product that they weren’t considering, and nearly as many have been inspired by a professional critic review (59%).

Reviews instill confidence in a consumer’s purchase decision. Almost every consumer (95%) reports gaining confidence in a purchase decision because of consumer reviews and the vast majority (86%) also feel more confident because of professional reviews. Confidence in a purchase increases the likelihood of a satisfactory product experience and repeat purchase.

“ As the landscape of product reviews becomes more fragmented and complex, marketers need to pay more attention than ever to their influence in consumers’ buying decisions. Perhaps Product Reviews should be counted as the fifth ‘P’ in today’s CE marketing plans. ”

**Bradford Williams**  
President, North American  
Technology Practice,  
Weber Shandwick

## Five Rules of Engagement for Tapping into the CE Opinion Opportunity

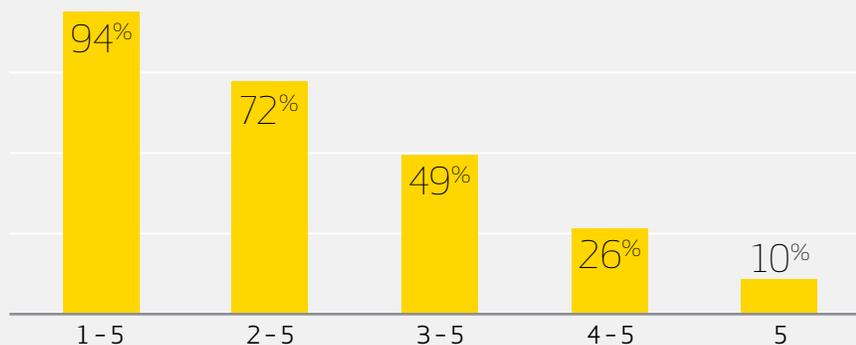
# 1

**Consumers navigate a maze of CE information.** Their journey for knowledge about consumer electronics can include several stops along the way.

Nearly three-quarters of consumers (72%) conduct at least two activities to gather opinions about CE products. Online and offline means are both used — 74% search for reviews online and 66% gather opinions offline. Other activities include reading “likes” or recommendations online (47%), watching videos (37%) and asking social network friends (28%).

Consumers want multiple viewpoints. They read 11 consumer reviews, on average, before making up their minds on a product.

### Number of activities CE buyers engage in when seeking product opinion



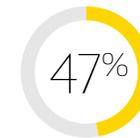
### Ways consumers seek out product opinions



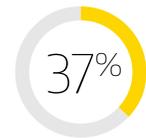
Search for reviews online about products they are considering



Ask someone, in person, by phone, or by email for their opinion about products they are considering



Read “likes” or recommendations about products on a website or social networking site



Watch an online video about someone's experiences with products they are considering



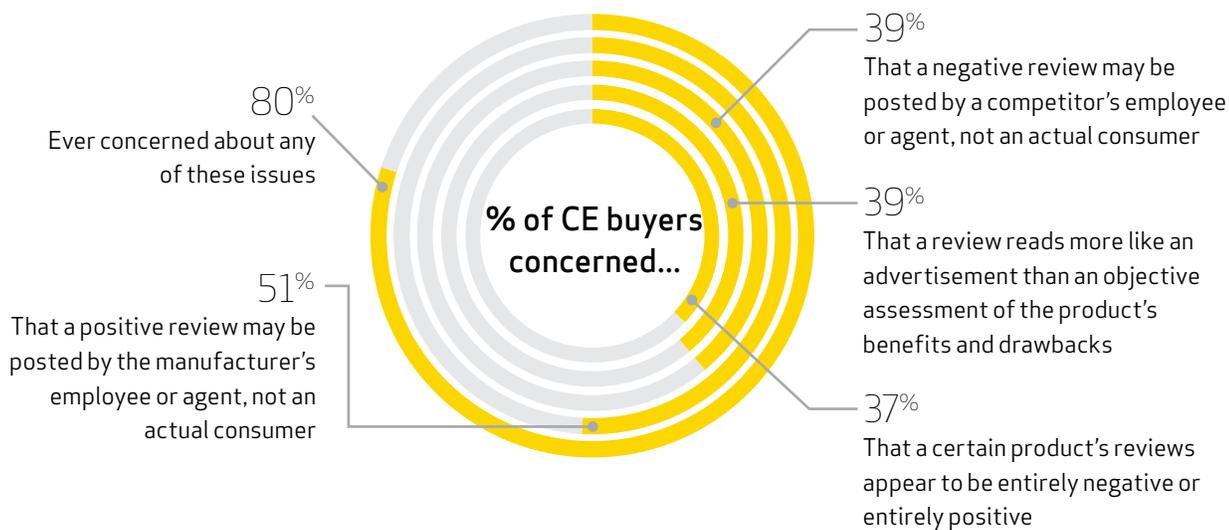
Ask their social network friends or followers about products they are considering

**11** Number of reviews consumers read, on average, before choosing a CE product

A significant four out of five consumers (80%) have reported being concerned about the authenticity of consumer reviews. Most typically, they are concerned that a positive review may have been “planted,” i.e., posted by the manufacturer’s employee or agent rather than by a consumer (51%).

Consumers don’t believe everything they read and bring a healthy dose of skepticism to the reviews research process. They say that for them to doubt the quality of a product, 31% of reviews, on average, have to be negative.

## Concerns about review authenticity issues



### Rule #1

When possible, companies should corral informative reviews by including a representative sampling onto the product website to assist consumers in simplifying the process and reducing the likelihood they’ll be distracted by a competitor’s product. This allows the company to reset expectations, address feedback and provide tips for product optimization to offer the best experience.

To help address skepticism about the authenticity of reviews, companies should adopt, and publicly announce, a policy restricting employees from commenting or contributing to customer reviews.

## 2

**Reviews sharpen the CE decision process.** Consumers consider themselves very knowledgeable about consumer electronics but rely heavily on reviews when choosing what to buy.

While nearly nine in 10 consumers (88%) identify themselves as somewhat or very knowledgeable about consumer electronics, most still consult reviews, consumer and/or professional, when looking to make a purchase (60% and 52%, respectively).

Positive consumer reviews are extremely important to 71% of Americans when they make a CE purchase decision, ranking third only behind price (78%) and product features (77%) but ahead of positive professional critic reviews (52%).

Reviews are helpful throughout the decision-making process, not just at one particular point in the cycle. Approximately four in 10 Americans always consult reviews when...

- Contemplating a purchase but don't have a specific brand or model in mind (38%)
- Deciding between different brands or models (41%)
- Needing a gut check on a final purchase decision (40%)

Reviews have become so critical to the CE decision process that their influence now greatly impacts gift-giving: a large majority of consumers (83%) expected to consider consumer and/or professional reviews for their 2012 holiday gift selection and more than half (52%) reported they are now assigning more weight to reviews as part of their holiday shopping experience.

88%

of Americans consider themselves somewhat or very knowledgeable about CE products

## Rule #2

Companies should create their product marketing pages as if they're producing an optimal review, not a piece of marketing collateral. The information on product pages should avoid "marketing speak" or overly technical language.

Just like any good review site, companies should employ straightforward and objective product-centric video on their product pages. Charts that compare the feature sets of various models, and in some cases competing products, can also help shoppers digest and compare features.

Companies should include links to and quotes from professional reviewer sites. The investment is typically worth it. But they shouldn't stop there. To further harness the power of customer reviews, CE brands should add customer review capabilities to their sites, and/or include reviews from consumer review sites.

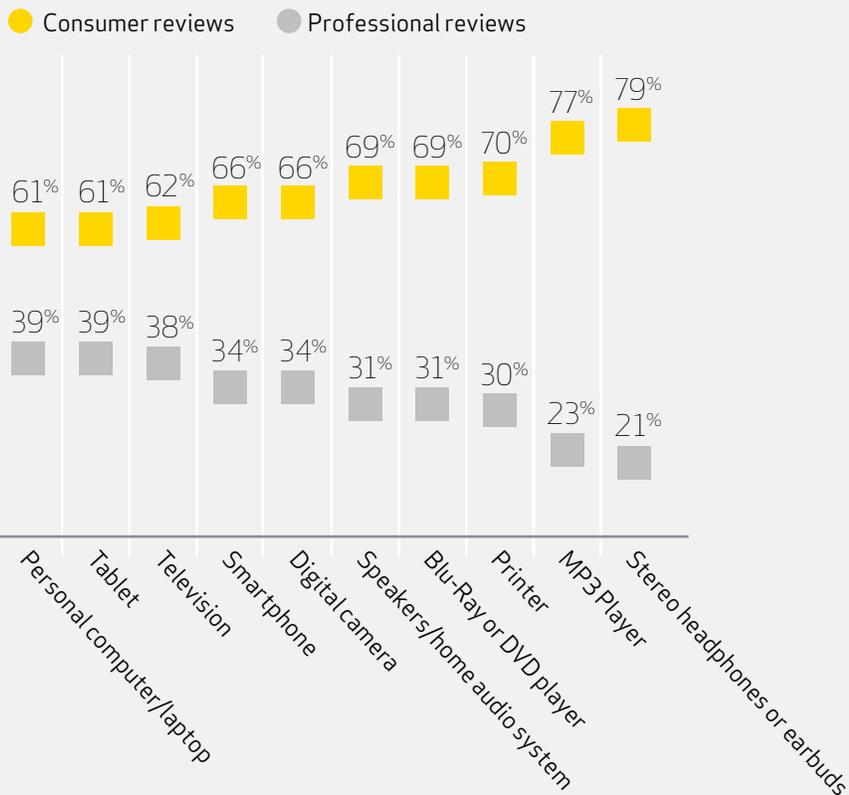
## 3

## Consumer reviews trump professional reviews for most CE categories.

The real-world experiences of fellow consumers often resonate more with buyers than expert opinions.

With 10 CE categories evaluated in our study, consumers consistently report that they pay more attention to consumer reviews than professional critic reviews. Attention to consumer reviews is greatest when consumers are considering headphones/earbuds and MP3 players. The gap between consumer and professional reviews is reduced significantly for more advanced technologies like tablets and computers.

### % of CE buyers who pay more attention to consumer reviews or professional reviews before purchasing specific CE products



By more than a **3-to-1** margin, consumers pay attention to consumer reviews over professional reviews for CE products in general (77% to 23%, respectively)

Both consumer and professional reviews become more important as the product's price increases. Marketers need to keep in mind that, especially for products costing \$1,000 or more, both consumer and professional reviews are frequently consulted. These types of reviews are used in tandem to help guide a major buying decision.

### % of CE buyers who always read consumer reviews or professional reviews before purchasing products at specific price ranges



## Rule #3

Marketers should be encouraging their customers to review their new products on review sites and/or on their own site. They also need dedicated resources to manage social network communities for purposes that go beyond branded content. An agency-based or internal community manager should be encouraging customers to review their products, disseminating positive customer and professional reviews through social channels, and working in tandem with customer service to respond to customer feedback or issues quickly.

As product development cycles become shorter and more frequent, it's more important than ever for CE marketing and customer service teams to share reviewer feedback and customer issues with their product management colleagues on a timely basis. According to Williams, "Close coordination between marketing, customer service and product management is essential in addressing customer feedback and ultimately, in bringing better products to market over time."

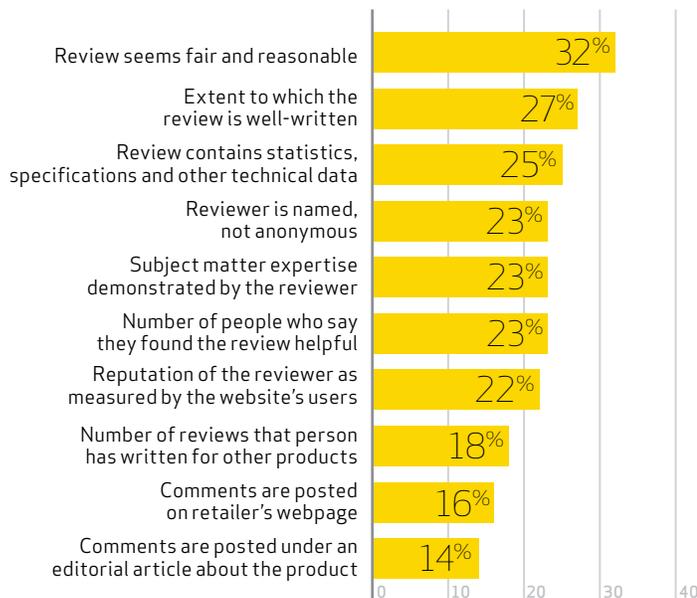
## 4

## Not all reviews are equal. The most influential reviews include certain elements.

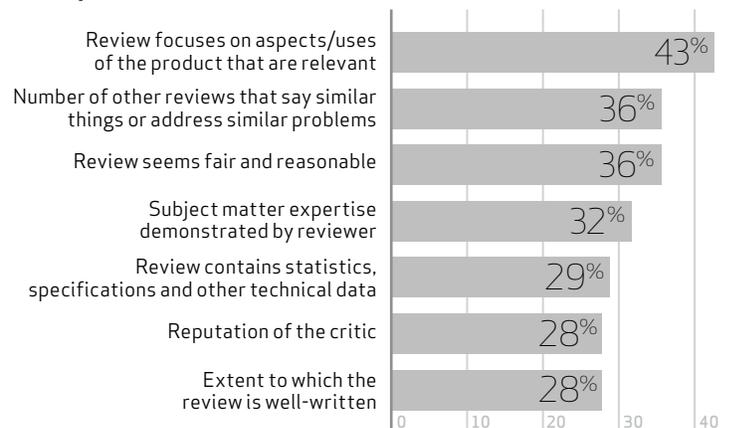
- Consumer reviews are most influential when the review seems fair and reasonable.
- Buyers find professional critic reviews most useful when the review has relevancy to them.
- Consumers hold professional reviewers to higher standards — a professional review has more value than a consumer review when the review is written by a subject matter expert, the writer has a good reputation, and the review is considered fair and reasonable and contains hard data.
- Named (vs. anonymous) consumer reviews have less of a positive impact on the perceived value of a review than other elements, and the same value as the reviewer's subject matter expertise or his or her "helpfulness ratings" from readers. Marketers cannot assume consumers are discounting anonymous reviews.
- Consumers are evenly divided on what they pay more attention to — positive vs. negative reviews (48% vs. 52%). Both require marketers' attention.

### How CE buyers review a review

#### Elements that impact buyers' evaluation of a consumer review



#### Elements that impact buyers' evaluation of a professional review



### Rule #4

While marketers can't directly influence user reviews, they can identify those that may have the most impact on potential buyers and post them to their own product websites, online forums and social network sites. They may

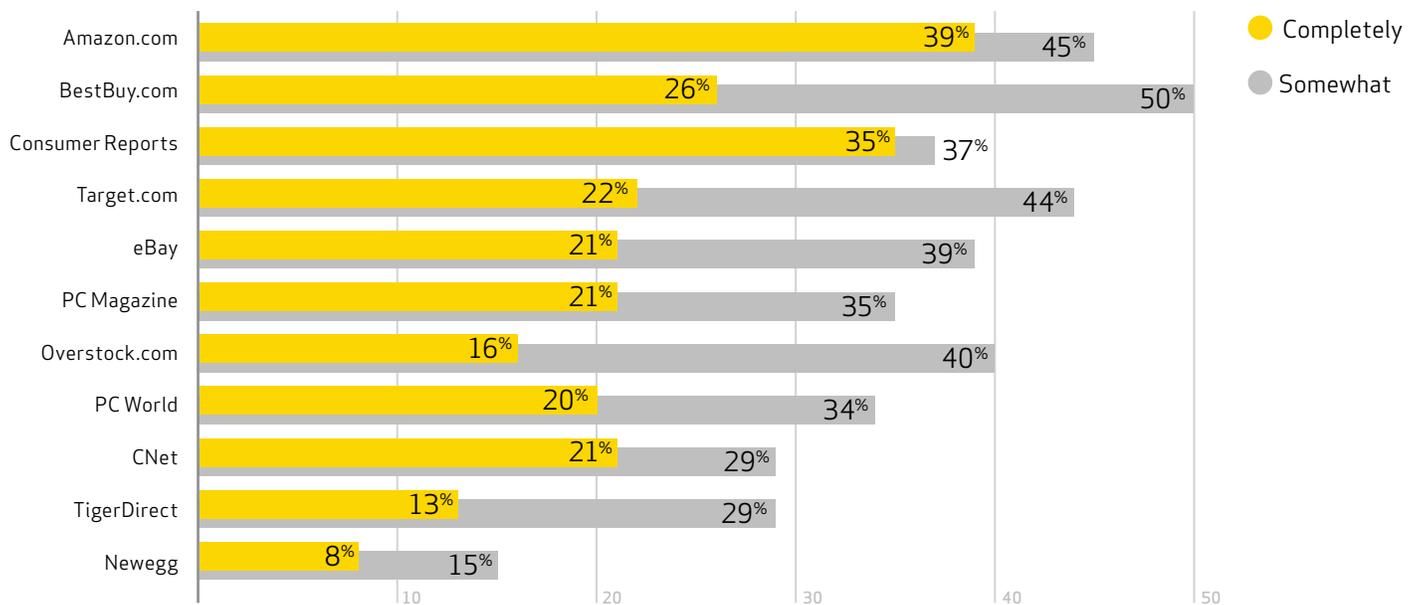
also want to prioritize what information they provide to journalists reviewing their products to increase the likelihood the review will include the product features most compelling and relevant to consumers.

## 5

## Consumers trust the reviews they find on popular websites — even if that website itself is in the business of selling CE products.

- CE buyers trust consumer reviews on Amazon.com the most (84%). The other highly trusted retailer website is Best Buy's, where a full three-quarters (75%) of CE shoppers go for consumer reviews.
- Consumer reviews on each of these leading e-commerce sites are more influential than even *Consumer Reports* — long considered the gold standard for authoritative product reviews. Product testing is moving out of the lab and into the home.
- In seeking product reviews online, consumers don't appear to distinguish between editorial and e-commerce sites. Consumers show no apparent discomfort in getting their research from a seller of the products they're considering.

### How much do you trust each of the following sites when looking online for CE reviews?



### Rule #5

Marketers should recognize that consumers are coming to shopping sites for reviews and information at various stages in their buying journey, not just to check a price or to click and buy. The product information on online shopping sites

should be as helpful and engaging as possible, employing video content, product feature charts and similar elements whenever possible.

For more information on “Buy It, Try It, Rate It,” please contact:

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