



Promotion Tool #2 – Reviews

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to talk about what is likely the second most important ranking factor on Amazon for any product – reviews.

"Built on Reviews"

Amazon has built its business on a few different building blocks but a key one is the tons and tons of reviews it has received for products it has listed.

When adding products to Amazon, a lot of people simply cut and paste the manufacturer's description which doesn't really help Amazon to rank on Google, which it now pretty much dominates. What does help is getting hundreds, thousands or even tens of thousands of unique reviews on a single product. If products are getting that many reviews, you can't blame Google for letting Amazon rank #1 for all kinds of different products.

So as you can see, Amazon has good reason to have reviews as a key building block for its business. Amazon not only recognizes that reviews are important to its customers because they get to see real people's opinions about the products and therefore more products get sold, but Amazon also knows that getting lots of reviews is good for search engine rankings.

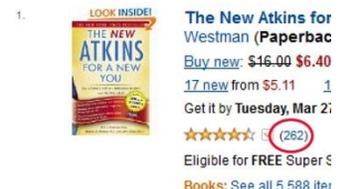
As a result, Amazon heavily weights the reviews a product has with where it ranks the product. However, it is not just the number of reviews but also the quality. If you receive a number of low-quality (e.g. 1 star) reviews, Amazon is going to see that the product is not very well liked and rank it lower, but if you receive a number of higher quality reviews (e.g. 4 or 5 star), Amazon will see that this is a popular product and will rank it much higher.

Examples

Example 1 – Ranked by Keyword:

This first example shows two products that compete in a keyword ranking. While it isn't exactly a fair comparison (one is a book and one is a food product), it is still a good example at least as far as how Amazon has ranked these two products based on keyword.

The keyword that is used in this example is "Atkins". As can be seen in the image to the right, the #1-ranked "Atkins" product (262) has a significantly larger number of reviews than the #2-ranked product (43). This shows the significance or weight that





Amazon has applied in the ranking by this keyword.

Example 2 – Ranked by Category:



Haier MWM0701TB Compact 2/3-Cubic-Foot
700-Watt Microwave Oven, Black

Buy new: ~~\$69.99~~ \$54.29

38 new

1 used from \$40.00

In Stock



Nostalgia Electrics RMO-400BLK Retro
Series .9 CF Microwave Oven, Black

Buy new: ~~\$149.99~~ \$121.61

9 new from \$99.99

Only 1 left in stock - order soon.



In this example, two products are shown for a particular category. Just as with ranking by keyword, ranking by category is heavily determined by reviews. In the image to the right you can see the huge difference in the number of reviews between the #1-ranked oven (87) and the #2-ranked oven (11) for this particular category (Home & Kitchen > Kitchen & Dining > Small Appliances > Microwave Ovens > Compact Microwave Ovens).

Note: there could be other factors involved here, such as length of time a particular product has been in the top rankings (remember the compounding effect), but it does provide a good illustration of the consistent impact of reviews – the more there are, the better-ranked your product will be.

The other thing to note here is that when you are getting reviews for your products on Amazon, whether it's a Kindle book, physical book or physical product, you don't need to receive thousands and thousands of reviews to rank well (assuming it's not a product that *does* require that number of reviews). All you really need is to get enough reviews to be able to compete with the market you are after, whether by category or keyword.

For example, if you get enough purchases, have a competitive price and are able to compete on all other points, with all things being equal it will be the reviews that will tip the scales in your favor. In the image above, the #1-ranked oven has 87 reviews. It is going to take a lot of reviews for the #2-ranked oven to surpass that, having only 11 reviews.

One thing to observe here is how similar this is to SEO – search engine optimization. If you want to rank well for a keyword in the search engines, one place you start with your research is to find out how many links are going to existing pages already ranking for that keyword. For example, if you want to compete with keyword "compact microwave ovens", you don't check to see how many links are going to pages ranking for "microwave ovens". In Amazon, you basically do the same thing but by comparing how many reviews and consider those figures when determining where and how you want to compete on Amazon.



Ratios – Positive to Negative

This section discusses the ratio of positive reviews to negative reviews.

In the example below, the ratio of negative reviews to positive reviews is high, given the number of total reviews. This ratio will clearly hurt your ranking:



It's always better to have positive reviews. However, if all the positive reviews were a 5-star rating, that could be a problem as well in that it could come across as suspicious (e.g. "dishonest" reviews). If the product is a good one then this ratio of reviews may not necessarily hurt you, but to avoid any suspicion you want to make sure that real customers are willing to give honest reviews. This may lead to some negative ones (e.g. a lower-star rating such as 3-star) and if you have only a few reviews you probably don't want any reviews below a 3-star, but as long as the review is real and (hopefully) honest, it can still be a good thing.

Here is an example of a review ratio that raises some suspicion. All of the reviews are 5-star which could be a good thing, but considering these are the only reviews, it raises some suspicion as to the legitimacy of the reviews, which is something you want to avoid if you can.



So, while the ratio of negative/positive reviews to the total number of reviews is important, equally important is the balance or ratio of negative reviews to positive reviews. For example, if you have a large number of reviews, it can actually be good to have a few negative reviews. This provides balance and tends to keep suspicion at bay. Fortunately, achieving this balance isn't as difficult as it might seem, even for great products, as there are people out there who like to complain over just about anything. So, whether from honest reviewers who simply didn't like your product or from these types who just like to complain and therefore give your product a low rating, as long as the balance is tipped in your favor (more positive reviews than negative) then it's okay to have those negative reviews there.

Consider the example to the right. As you can see, there are 810 reviews in total of which 58 are 1-star. However, 621 are 5-star, so having such a "large" number of negative reviews isn't going to hurt this product's ranking and the product may in fact benefit from the balance.





Reviews – How to Get Them

Now that you know the importance of getting reviews and about the value of a balanced ratio of positive to negative reviews, it's time to turn your attention to how to get reviews.

In a previous lesson you learned about the real-life experience of Tim Ferriss, author of the book '*The Four Hour Body*'. He writes about the 12 lessons he learned while marketing this book (you can read it [here](#)).

Here is what stands out in how Tim marketed '*The Four Hour Body*':

- **Created an awesome book trailer** – he created the video "The 4-Hour Body: Official Video Trailer". You can see it on [his blog](#) or on YouTube ([here](#)). He used this hard-hitting video to promote his book, which generated a viral buzz because it made people want to know what goes on inside the book.
- **Leveraged existing blog traffic and Twitter followers** – Tim not only used his blog to promote his book but he also used his Twitter account. Both of these had great traffic he was able to leverage. For example, at the time of creating this lesson, Tim had 305,092 followers on Twitter.
- **Sent out more than 1000 advanced copies** – you may not have 300+ thousand followers on Twitter, but you can still use this approach. Tim basically gave 1000 copies to friends, family, other people who bought books from him, blog followers, etc. These were all people he knew would take some action on his behalf (e.g. write a review on his Amazon product). He did this before the book went for sale on Amazon.
- **Sent out "Urgent" email** – on the day of his Amazon book launch, Tim sent out an email to those he gave a book to with the subject line "Urgent". In his email he asked them to write an Amazon review within 24 hours, whether they liked the book or not. He didn't tell them to just write 5-star reviews... he trusted he had a good product and put it in the hands of others to provide the evidence (e.g. write a review).

What were the results of this?

- **Received more than 140 reviews within the first 24 hours** - this is enough to drive just about any product to the top spot!
- **200 positive reviews in first week**
- **Now there are over 1600 Amazon reviews** – compare this against any other product in the categories he is ranking in... he absolutely crushes the competition for number of reviews!
- **He sold over 1 million copies of his book!** – this is a real testament to the power of Amazon and the opportunity that's available to those who learn to market on Amazon.



Lesson #1 - Use your social network

This doesn't just mean Facebook and Twitter, although those certainly help. There's also the real world social networks you can leverage – family, friends, colleagues, professionals you interact with, etc. Making your product available to your social network can be a great catalyst for a large number of immediate reviews.

Story Time – A Real Life Example:

This story shows how lesson #1 was applied and leads effectively into lesson #2, which was also applied.

There was a company we were competing with on a similar product that kept us from ever getting into the #1 spot. It wasn't so much that their product was better or priced better or anything like that. The one issue (there may have been others, but this one definitely stands out and is applicable to this lesson) is that this seller had way more reviews (300) than we did despite having an equal product.

What was discovered through some of this company's reviewers who were telling the story and let out what was going on is that this company would send along a postcard with a delivered order stating that if the customer would go to the Amazon listing and write a review for the product, they would give them another unit for free.

This basically amounts to this company leveraging their customer network to get more reviews (lesson #1) by providing their customers with incentive to write a review (lesson #2). This strategy worked really well for them as they crushed the rest of us with the number of reviews they had and managed to hold on to the #1 ranking for a good period of time.

Lesson #2 – Inclusion

There's two parts to this lesson. First, if you are sending a physical product, **include a bonus** for reviewing your product. You may not be able to send another unit of the original product (e.g. too expensive) but you may be able to provide a less expensive product or, in the case of books, a free report, free guide, etc.

Now be sure that when you're soliciting reviews that you don't "lead the witness". It's actually a bit shady and even illegal to some degree. So when asking for reviews, don't include such lines as "please provide a 4-5 star review on my product." Instead, simply ask for the review and let them decide what star rating to apply, based on their personal experience with your product.

The second part of this lesson is that if you are selling a book (physical or Kindle), you can **include a page** that encourages people to go write a review of your book on Amazon. You can have this a few times in your book (don't go overboard on this as it can have negative results).



Other Ways to Get Reviews

There are other equally valid and effective ways to go about getting reviews:

- **Give your product away for free** - this is completely within Amazon's Terms of Service and is how big name authors (and not-so-big-name authors who want to become big) do very well on Amazon - they give free copies of their book away and ask the recipients of the free books to write reviews on Amazon for them. So, you probably want to start with friends and family (or at least people who agree to write a review if they get a free copy), but giving your product away is a great strategy to get tons of reviews. With a digital product like a Kindle book, this strategy costs you nothing!
- **Ask Amazon customers by sending a message within Seller Central** – after you have given customers a chance to use/read your product, either you or an outsourcer you hire can go through each order and send the customer a request to review your product, e.g. "If you are liking my product, I sure would appreciate you writing a review on it."
- **Use outsourcing services like Elance.com/Odesk.com/Fiverr.com** – there are people on these sites who will write product reviews for you. Now you do want to be careful if the person doesn't ask for your product to do the review as this probably represents some shady review company or person and the review is probably not going to be of good quality or it will look phony. If your product is a Kindle book, it will be easy to provide them with a copy.
- **Use outsourcers/reviewers employed by you** – rather than using a service like Elance, Odesk or Fiverr, you can use someone you may actually know and who is a decent writer. You can send them the product and have them do whatever it is that needs to be done with it (e.g. if a book, read it) for them to write you a review.

Conclusion

As you should be able to see by now, reviews play an important role in getting your product ranked. The various methods for getting reviews are all legitimate and there is nothing wrong with using them. By following these strategies, you are simply being proactive in getting people to review your products.

Take Tim Ferriss' approach, for example. He provided his product and asked people to do him the one little favor – write a review on Amazon about it. Such tactics as these put him at the top of the rankings and resulted in him selling over 1 million copies of his book. You may not be selling a book and you may not sell over 1 million units (Kindle/physical book, physical product) but following these strategies should still net you a pretty good profit.